



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)
and
**JOURNAL OF
PROCEEDINGS**

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(11 February 2020 to 8 March 2020)

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Assembly Members

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Allen, Andy (East Belfast)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)
Archibald, Dr Caoimhe (East Londonderry)
Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)

B

Bailey, Ms Clare (South Belfast)
Barton, Mrs Rosemary (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Blair, John (South Antrim)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Maurice (East Londonderry)
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)
Bradley, Ms Sinéad (South Down)
Bradshaw, Ms Paula (South Belfast)
Buchanan, Keith (Mid Ulster)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)
Buckley, Jonathan (Upper Bann)
Bunting, Ms Joanne (East Belfast)
Butler, Robbie (Lagan Valley)

C

Cameron, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)
Carroll, Gerry (West Belfast)
Catney, Pat (Lagan Valley)
Chambers, Alan (North Down)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)

D

Dallat, John (East Londonderry)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dillon, Ms Linda (Mid Ulster)
Dodds, Mrs Diane (Upper Bann)
Dolan, Ms Jemma (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)

E

Easton, Alex (North Down)
Ennis, Ms Sinéad (South Down)

F

Flynn, Ms Órlaithí (West Belfast)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)

G

Gildernew, Colm (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)

H

Hargey, Ms Deirdre (South Belfast)
Harvey, Harry (Strangford)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)

I

Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)

K

Kearney, Declan (South Antrim)
Kelly, Ms Catherine (West Tyrone)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kimmins, Ms Liz (Newry and Armagh)

L

Long, Mrs Naomi (East Belfast)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Lyons, Gordon (East Antrim)
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)

M

McAleer, Declan (West Tyrone)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)
McCrossan, Daniel (West Tyrone)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGrath, Colin (South Down)
McGuigan, Philip (North Antrim)
McHugh, Maoliosa (West Tyrone)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McLaughlin, Ms Sinead (Foyle)
McNulty, Justin (Newry and Armagh)
Mallon, Ms Nichola (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (Speaker)
Middleton, Gary (Foyle)
Muir, Andrew (North Down)
Mullan, Ms Karen (Foyle)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)

N

Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)

O

O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
O'Toole, Matthew (South Belfast)

P

Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)

R

Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Rogan, Ms Emma (South Down)

S

Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Sheerin, Ms Emma (Mid Ulster)
Stalford, Christopher (South Belfast)
Stewart, John (East Antrim)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)

W

Weir, Peter (Strangford)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Woods, Miss Rachel (North Down)

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Deputy First Minister.....	Mrs Michelle O’Neill
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Minister for Infrastructure.....	Ms Nichola Mallon
Minister for the Economy.....	Mrs Diane Dodds
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Mr Edwin Poots
Minister of Education	Mr Peter Weir
Minister of Finance	Mr Conor Murphy
Minister of Health.....	Mr Robin Swann
Minister of Justice.....	Mrs Naomi Long

Junior Ministers

The Executive Office	Mr Declan Kearney Mr Gordon Lyons
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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Settings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 February 2020

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Speaker's Rulings

Mr Speaker: Members, Mr Allister raised a point of order last Monday about remarks made to him by the Minister of Finance during Question Time. It was clearly a heated exchange, and I have written to both Members to advise them to ensure that they meet the standards expected in the Chamber. I do not intend to rehearse the incident any further and consider the matter closed, but I want to take the opportunity to give the House an indication of my approach to the standard of debate required.

As the Principal Deputy Speaker pointed out on Monday, previous Speakers' rulings have focused less on individual words being deemed unparliamentary and more on the tone and context in which they are said, and that ensures that Members show one another respect in the Chamber no matter what words they use. Tone and context will remain important considerations for me when judging our debates. There are, of course, myriad important issues to be dealt with in the time ahead on which Members will not agree. It should still be perfectly possible to express and challenge opinions robustly, but that must be done with respect, courtesy, good temper and moderation. Those are the standards that Members should observe and that I intend to uphold.

We have to be mindful that what is said in this place is not simply a matter of relationships between Members, as crucial as those are. We also have a leadership role to play in the wider community. At a time when there have been community divisions and when developments such as social media often make abusive language more commonplace, we should be careful to set an example that helps to minimise those tensions rather than add fuel to them. We are all fully aware that there is much to do to build confidence in the Assembly, and we all have a role to play in that. If people watching from outside can see the main issues of the day being dealt with constructively and respectfully, that would be a very good start.

Finally, if Members are in any doubt as to how they can express themselves in an orderly way, I encourage them to return to my remarks this afternoon in the Official Report and be guided by them.

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

Mr Speaker: I am not taking any points of order on the matter. The matter is closed.

Tributes to Former Members

Mr Speaker: Last week, the Assembly observed the normal convention to express condolences on the death of our late colleague Francie Brolly. From a distance, public perceptions often focus only on the party political differences among Members. They often overlook the respect for one another, the strong working relationships and the friendships that are created while pursuing common interests on behalf of our constituencies and sections of our community, and that is why the convention to pay respect to former colleagues exists.

However, during the period when the Assembly was not sitting, a number of other former Members passed away, but there was no opportunity to extend the same convention to them. Having consulted with the Business Committee last week, I take the opportunity put that right today and allow the Assembly to pay its respects on the record.

Today we remember eight former colleagues who served in the Assembly: P J Bradley, the SDLP MLA for South Down from 1998 to 2011, who would undoubtedly be proud that his daughter Sinéad continues the legacy of the Bradley name in the Assembly; Pat O'Rawe, the Sinn Féin MLA for Newry and Armagh from 2003 to 2007 and former Mayor of Armagh, whom I obviously knew and respected as a party colleague; Donovan McClelland, the SDLP MLA for South Antrim from 1998 to 2003, who was one of the first Deputy Speakers of the Assembly; Oliver Gibson, the DUP MLA for West Tyrone from 1998 to 2003, who, like Francie Brolly and Séamus Mallon, whom we have lost in recent weeks, gave significant public service as a teacher; the Rev Robert Coulter, the UUP MLA for North Antrim from 1998 to 2011, who was a long-serving member of the Assembly Commission; Dr Ian Adamson, the UUP MLA for East Belfast from 1998 to 2003, who was a former Lord Mayor of Belfast; Wilson Clyde, the DUP MLA for South Antrim from 1998 to 2007, after a lifetime in the agriculture industry; and Seamus Close, the Alliance Party MLA for Lagan Valley from 1998 to 2007 and former deputy leader of the party. We formally express our belated sympathies to their families, colleagues, friends and, of course, parties.

The fact that many Members here today may recognise the names but had never met those Members highlights the fact that, increasingly, the Assembly relies on a new generation to take it forward. However, a few of us, including me, worked alongside almost all of them throughout their tenure in the Assembly in the early days, which were also difficult days. While I knew some of them better than others, I acknowledge the significant public service and sacrifice that they made to their constituencies and our society as a whole. No matter the challenges that continue to exist, we should not overlook the problems faced in the first terms of the Assembly and the pressures that they imposed on those who were Members at that time. I extend my personal condolences to all the families, friends and colleagues of the deceased. We, therefore, record our thanks for the contribution that all those colleagues made to public service, the Assembly and our community.

I invite other Members to add their tributes.

Mrs Foster: Let me say, Speaker, that this is a very timely matter that you have brought to us today, which, obviously, comes all together, for very obvious reasons. It is important that we remember former colleagues in this way. My

colleagues will pay tribute to individual Members, but, as First Minister and leader of the DUP, I put on record my sympathy to all the families who were bereaved during the three years that we did not meet in this place. It is important that we recognise the service that was given by those Members, as you rightly said, sometimes in difficult and challenging times. We sometimes think that we are the only politicians to live through challenging times, but I well remember that first Assembly and how there were many challenges to be dealt with. I particularly pay tribute, of course, to Oliver Gibson and Wilson Clyde, who were members of my party and served with distinction during that time. I pass my condolences to their families and all the families of the Members who are remembered here today.

Mr O'Dowd: I also welcome the opportunity to add tributes to the Members who have passed away since the Assembly last sat. As has been said quite often but deserves to be repeated, public life is not always an easy life. I admire anyone who steps forward to serve in public life, regardless of which political tradition or background they come from or espouse to. I knew some of the Members who passed away. I pay particular tribute to Pat O'Rawe, who, as you mentioned in your opening comments, was the first Sinn Féin mayor of Armagh city. I worked with Pat in the Assembly on a number of committees in preparing for the establishment of the Assembly pre 2007. Often when public figures lose their life, it is forgotten that there are family members left behind — they could be partners, husbands, wives, children etc — who grieve the person while society grieves the public representative.

I also pay tribute to Rev Robert Coulter, who represented his constituents in a very quiet and humble way but made his point. I remember that, when I was Education Minister, he lobbied extensively for schools in his constituency. He always did it in a very respectful way, but he made his point. I think we could learn a lot of lessons from how the Rev Coulter went about his business.

So, to all those who lost their life since that last sitting of the Assembly and to all their family members — I think of Sinéad Bradley and pay tribute to P J, whom I also worked with and knew — we pay tribute to them and honour their memory.

Ms Mallon: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for creating the space for us today to reflect on the contributions of former Members who passed away over the past three years.

On behalf of the SDLP, I express my sincere condolences to the families of all those who served their communities here and to the current Members who served with them in difficult times. While we often disagree in this Assembly, it is fair to say that, more often than not, political battles rarely infect the personal relationships that have been built across our parties and communities. The strength of this place should be our ability to respectfully differ but to never stop working together in the substantial common interests of those we represent. That is the thread that connects the contributions of all those across all parties we are remembering today.

I pay particular tribute to those SDLP voices that are no longer with us. If you were looking for inspiration on how to connect with your community and represent its interests, you would need look no further than P J Bradley. A fierce and compassionate advocate for Burren, Warrenpoint

and Ballyholland, P J's loyalty was to the people of South Down before anyone else. That spoke to his values and his character. P J was a patriot in the truest sense of the word, working quietly without fanfare to bring our communities together and build a resilient peace. He was a trailblazer in initiating the campaign for Narrow Water bridge, a campaign his daughter Sinéad has taken up with the same vigour. I know how proud he was when Sinéad won his seat in South Down, and I have no doubt that, the moment the votes were tallied, he was already thinking about the next campaign. Their contribution to our party, to South Down and to Ireland has been immense.

I also reflect on the contribution Donovan McClelland made to peace and politics on this island. As an SDLP delegate to the Brooke-Mayhew talks and a participant in the Good Friday negotiations, Donovan was an important member of our negotiating team and a key part of that immense effort to get an agreement over the line in 1998. He then worked to sustain these institutions as Deputy Speaker, winning respect for his unfailing fairness to all Members.

It is impossible to reflect on Donovan's life without mentioning the lasting legacy of love he had for his family. I have the privilege of working with Donovan's wife, Noreen, who is one of the North's most genuinely caring public representatives. Her support for him during peace talks and her work since has created a lasting legacy that they both share as pillars of our peace. Life in politics is never easy, not least for our family members, who, in many ways, have to share us with our constituents. It can be difficult for them as their husband, wife, father or mother work long hours; as we know, being an elected representative is not a nine-to-five job. At the same time, it is with great pride that they see their loved ones battling tirelessly and serving relentlessly their constituents as they strive to make life better for their own children and for all children across Northern Ireland.

I have no doubt that the families of P J Bradley, Donovan McClelland, Seamus Close, Dr Ian Adamson, Pat O'Rawe, Rev Robert Coulter, Oliver Gibson and Wilson Clyde are all filled with immense pride at the contribution and legacy that they each made to making this place of ours that much better.

12.15 pm

Dr Aiken: On behalf of the rest of the Members from the Ulster Unionist Party, I pay tribute to all our Members, but in particular to Rev Robert Coulter and Dr Ian Adamson.

Rev Coulter was a man of faith who served in the Assembly from just before its formation in 1996, when he was elected to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue, where he served as the UUP Chief Whip. He had a long political career. In 1985, Robert was elected as a UUP councillor to Ballymena Borough Council. He retained his seat in 1989, and, in 1993, was re-elected to the council and also elected as the first UUP Mayor of Ballymena since the early 1970s. He served as first citizen of Ballymena from 1993 to 1996. He was part of the team in the background that laid the negotiation foundations for what was to become the Belfast Agreement in 1998, and he was elected as a North Antrim Assembly Member in 1998, a seat he was to hold until his retirement in 2011. During his entire Assembly career, he was a member of the Assembly Commission.

He was also active in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which saw him represent the Assembly at conferences at India, Australia and Canada. In the Assembly, he also served on the Health Committee and on the Employment and Learning Committee and was our party spokesman on both portfolios during his time on those Committees. In 2010, he was awarded an MBE for his services to the Commission and to the Assembly.

Following his retirement in 2011, he championed the cause of special needs education and, something that was very dear to his heart, he served as a chaplain to the Ulster Defence Regiment Association and was president of the mid-Antrim branch of the Ulster Special Constabulary Association. Rev Dr Coulter passed away on 5 September 2018 after a long battle with cancer. We remember him very fondly, and we pass on our prayers and good wishes to his surviving family.

Dr Ian Adamson was a former Ulster Unionist Party Lord Mayor of Belfast who died in Belfast. He was a man of many talents and interests. He represented the Victoria electoral area on Belfast City Council from 1989 to 2011 and served as Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor and High Sheriff. He was also the MLA for East Belfast between 1998 and 2003 and was a founder member of the Somme Association. In addition to his political career, he was a medical doctor and had a keen interest and provided a wealth of knowledge in the field of history, particularly local history and Ulster Scots. As many of us can testify, he was the author of numerous books and papers. He made a huge contribution to cultural and political life and will be greatly missed by all his friends in the party. Indeed, Lord Empey, who served with Dr Adamson in both City Hall and Stormont, said he had :

"a great sense of humour and dry wit. His flair for cultural issues, particularly as they applied to the Ulster Scots tradition, were brought to life with his lectures and anecdotes. Those of us who were colleagues in the City Hall will miss him greatly."

Indeed, he will probably be looking down now with amusement as there was one time in the Assembly where he made a short contribution in Welsh, and a Member from Sinn Féin congratulated him on his fluency in Irish. Adamson corrected him:

"It is the oldest British tongue; it is the language of the Welsh." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 2, p247, col 2].

He is survived by his family, and we wish them all the best wishes.

Mrs Long: It feels very strange to be making these tributes to colleagues in this way, but I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity to do so. I hope that Members from other parties will forgive me for focusing on my late colleague Seamus Close in my remarks today.

He was one of the first people to join Alliance when it was first formed in 1970, driven by his belief that the horror that was unfolding on our streets needed to stop and that Northern Ireland needed to change. Characteristically, he did not sit back and wait for someone else to do the heavy lifting, but rolled up his sleeves and he did it himself. In 1973, he was first elected to the new Lisburn Borough Council, and between his role there and as an MLA, he served as an Alliance elected representative for over 34

years. One of the highlights of that time for him was in 1993, when he became the first Catholic and non-unionist mayor of Lisburn council. His first act on that occasion was to write to the leaders of all the local churches to ask if he could attend worship with them. That is a measure of how he tried to instil respect at the heart of everything he did. He was always willing to share his advice and experience with others, often, whether we wanted it or not, and to share his views with younger councillors and politicians. That advice — that you could have it out in the chamber, you could have hot and heavy arguments, but if you could not go outside, shake hands and still be friends at the end of it, you were in the wrong job — is good advice for all of us in this Chamber, too.

Seamus was very much a conviction politician. That showed in his courageous stand on paramilitarism and his unswerving commitment to creating a shared future. He was an inspiring person to work with, to listen to and with whom to be part of the same team. His style was direct and blunt, something which I personally like, and he never pulled his punches with anyone, not even his party colleagues. That style led to his being not just respected but a very useful negotiator: people knew where they stood and knew that he could be relied upon to still be standing there when they returned to him later. They were able to rely on him to be honest and forthright with his opinions. However, that directness was also laced with a wit and humour, which made him not just respected but much liked. It also meant that, post-retirement, he made the transition to political commentator seamlessly, aided hugely by his independence of thought. Having shared a studio with him in his role as commentator on occasion, I certainly never took it for granted that Seamus would agree with me and always felt very relieved on the occasions when he did. I have no doubt that those of you who also shared a studio with him will have felt the same relief.

In the Assembly, Seamus's training in business came to the fore, particularly in finance. His desire to know that public money was not misspent made him a passionate advocate on the Public Accounts Committee. He was always ready to challenge where he felt that there was waste or that money could be better spent and was always conscious that it came from someone else's pocket and should be taken care of properly.

While Seamus was a formidable debater, a fierce opponent and a fearless defender of democracy, he was, at heart, a family man. It is fitting that his wife, Deirdre, has been able to join us today. To her, Natasha, Stephen, Brian and Christopher, and to his grandchildren, I want to extend our ongoing thoughts and prayers at this time. I never had the pleasure of being in the Chamber with him, but we were part of the same Assembly team during the hiatus in proceedings between 2003 and 2007. It was an honour to be so. He was always an encourager to me. He encouraged me to not mince my words, to be direct and to be truthful in what I said. Some of you may wish that I had taken his advice less to heart than, perhaps, I have. He was larger than life. He was full of good humour and a generous spirit. He is very much missed by all of us who knew him.

Mr T Buchanan: Of course, it is good to take time to remember and reflect on those who used to serve in the House, sat on these Benches and made their contributions to society and the constituencies that they served. Sadly,

they are no longer with us. A number of them were in the House when I came here in 2003. I had the privilege of serving alongside some of them. We will all remember them in different ways; for the different contributions that they made and the service that they provided to their constituencies.

As for me, I remember with fondness my dear friend and colleague Oliver Gibson. Oliver was the person who brought me into politics at the very outset. He brought me into council and paved the way for me to follow him into the Assembly in 2003. He was someone who lived for politics. He made some very valuable contributions indeed. He delivered for his constituents. He was a former schoolteacher and vice-principal of Omagh High School. He was passionate about education and delivering for the people of West Tyrone. He was also a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and he wanted to make sure that law and order was protected for the people of Northern Ireland.

Oliver made some very good contributions to and deliveries for the people in West Tyrone, which still stand as a testament to him. Throughout the length and breadth of West Tyrone, people still talk passionately about Oliver Gibson and his legacy.

Today, we remember all the respective families whose homes have been left with a vacant chair and a voice silenced. As they seek to learn to live with the loss that they have sustained, I want simply to pass on our deepest and heartfelt sympathy to them all. I trust and pray that they will know God's help and blessing in the days that lie ahead. It is always difficult when a dearly loved one is taken from us. You do not get over it, but you learn to live with it. As those families learn to live with their grief, sorrow and loss, we assure them of our prayers. It behoves each one of us in the Chamber to number our days and to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Ms Kimmins: I echo the comments of other Members about former Members who have passed away in the last three years. I pay tribute to Pat O'Rawe, a former MLA for the constituency that I now represent, Newry and Armagh. I thank Pat for her service to the constituents of that area during her time in the Assembly and as the first Sinn Féin Mayor of Armagh City and District Council.

Ms S Bradley: First, I offer my condolences to my friend and colleague, Pat Catney, who today lays his mother, Eileen, to rest. I extend my condolences to his siblings Elizabeth, Laurence, Jim, Dymphna, Damian, Patrick, Assumpta and Broz-ana.

I also add my belated words of sympathy to all families of former Members who have been, rightly, remembered here today. I welcome Noreen McClelland, the wife of former Member Donovan McClelland, who is in the Public Gallery today.

It is at times like this when all our differences, whether real or merely perceived, vanish. As P J Bradley's daughter and an elected representative of the House, I find myself in the most unusual and highly privileged position of being able to stand and thank each of you for the kind words and expressions of condolence that you offered to me and my family following our loss. The sheer volume of kind words of condolence extended to us, often coupled with shared personal stories that beautifully captured Daddy's kindness, has been overwhelming and most comforting. To

each of the individuals who reached out to comfort us from near and far, we are truly grateful.

Before and after politics, P J — or Daddy, as he was known in our house — held one rule above all others during his lifetime: his respect for human life was paramount; his commitment to peace unwavering. In this Chamber, Daddy's love for Ireland and its people was repeatedly displayed: his tireless work on the delivery of Irish passport services to post offices here; the realisation of his vision for all-island free travel; and reaching out to the undocumented Irish abroad. These were just some of the projects that he pursued with passion. Daddy immensely enjoyed representing all the people of South Down and his time on the Agriculture Committee. He did so with great humility, diligence and respect for all.

It is my opinion, however, that local issues brought him the greatest sense of achievement. Projects such as securing a village green for our parish in Burren, and placing on it a millennium wall that recorded the name of every person who was living in the parish on millennium day, mark some of his local legacy. He was an avid GAA supporter who never missed an all-Ireland football final, and a lifelong member of St Mary's GAC. It is not possible for me even to begin putting on record the vast range of achievements that Daddy accomplished in his lifetime.

Thankfully for me, much of them have been captured in the books that he published before his passing. Of course, any work unfinished has been passed to me and others to administer for completion, so there is absolutely no pressure on delivering the Narrow Water bridge.

12.30 pm

On behalf of my mother, Leontia, my siblings Martin, Joanne, Deborah, Catherine, Stephanie, William and Miceal, Daddy's brother, Liam, and sisters Nora and Nuala, and all our extended families, I thank the House and all of those who offered words of comfort to us. So many people stepped in to help us. I am acutely aware that, in naming some people, I will leave others out. However, I cannot let the moment pass without personally thanking Father Charlie Byrne, Roisin McCrink, my office staff, Sean O'Hare, and the McAteer family, all of whom offered us great support at a very difficult time.

Finally, I use the opportunity to place on record our huge appreciation to the medical team who supported Daddy during his short illness and to the Southern Area Hospice, which supported Daddy and our family during what was a very peaceful passing. I will always be proud to be P J's daughter. Rest in peace, Daddy.

Mr Swann: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing this business to proceed today. Like other Members, I pay tribute to those former Members who have passed away, in particular Rev Dr Bob Coulter, who was a personal friend and mentor to me. As John O'Dowd and our party leader have already expressed, Bob's passion for health and for employment and learning matters in this place is something that he held deeply. He brought that experience to bear in the delivery of Castle Tower special school in Ballymena. Many will see that as part of his enduring legacy, because he was chair of the board of governors from the original concept to the delivery of the school. I know that he did not make John's job as Education

Minister easy at times, but the way in which he conducted that campaign brought about the delivery of the school.

It has been noted that, during his time at Stormont, he moved around the corridors not just with ease but with speed. He often left many a staff member or visitor finding it hard to keep up with him. In the tributes that have been paid, everyone has acknowledged his warmth and the personal time that he gave to anyone whom he met. He was a man who was as comfortable sitting at a kitchen table up a lane in Clogh as he was sitting down to tea with Nelson Mandela.

Like many, I am blessed to have learned from Bob's experience. Having had him as a political mentor and guide has been a great resource to me. A mentor is someone who wants to see you rise to the top and is willing to help you get there, even if it means letting you stand on his shoulders. Bob would not mind my saying that, even with me on his shoulders or him on mine, there is many a hedge or wall in North Antrim that neither of us could have seen over. *[Laughter.]* For those who knew him, he was a man who had a story for every occasion and eventuality. It was only at the end of those stories that you could tell by the glint in his eye whether he had been winding you up. I once said to him that he taught me everything that I know of the craft of politics. His answer to me, with that same smile, was, "Yes, but I didn't teach you everything I know".

Unfortunately, Elizabeth, Bob's wife, constant companion, confidante and adviser, passed away only a few weeks ago. I pass on my condolences and our condolences to comfort John, Liz, Sharon, Nick, Dan and Adam and the wider family circle. It is known that Bob was a man of great faith who had great love for the Lord. It was his greatest strength, and the gift to us all is that we are assured that he is walking the corridors of power in a better place with the same ease, grace and welcome that he walked the corridors here in Stormont.

Mr Lunn: I pay tribute to all the Members whom you mentioned at the start of proceedings. I cannot say that I knew them all very well, but I remember P J Bradley as an absolute gentleman. He was a pleasure to be with. I also knew the Rev Robert Coulter. I will say exactly the same thing about him: he was a true gentleman and made some great contributions to the House. Oddly enough, I also remember Oliver Gibson. I knew him before he got into politics, back in the '70s. He was another gentleman, but I knew him through education, so I will not say anything about his politics.

In particular, I will carry on from what Naomi said about Seamus Close and then say a few words about Dr Ian Adamson. Seamus Close was the reason I joined Alliance back in 1989. I will not repeat what Naomi said about him, but I will amplify it slightly. He was awarded the OBE in 1997 for his contribution to public services, and, in 2010, he was awarded the freedom of the city of Lisburn, along with Ivan Davis, who was a past Deputy Speaker here, and Edwin Poots's father, Charlie Poots. They all achieved the freedom of the city on the same day — all richly deserved.

Seamus had many strings to his bow. He was, for instance, a prison visitor at the Maze prison for some time, and his concern for the welfare of prisoners and staff was very evident at times. He was capable of demonstrating his sense of humour. You might remember when a tunnel was

discovered under a fence at the Maze. Seamus stood up at Lisburn council and speculated that he was not too sure if it was for people trying to get in or people trying to get out, because of the benevolent regime that was the public perception of what went on in the Maze at that time.

Seamus was the first non-unionist Mayor of Lisburn, but he even made a joke about that: he said that he was the first one who had a beard. That was Seamus. He was a very gifted debater in the Assembly and in council. He did 38 years' unbroken service on council — more than half a lifetime. I do not know how he stuck it, but he did, and fair play to him. He was a massive contributor to the affairs of Lisburn and to Lisburn council.

Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 — in which election Seamus topped the poll in Lisburn, which is fairly unusual for an Alliance person, but he did — he was tipped at that time to assume your job, Mr Speaker. It did not happen for him, but I know that it was a possibility, because he was sitting in my house when he received the call in which he was offered the job by a Northern Ireland Office Minister. He indicated that he would accept it, but it did not happen for him. We heard on the news later that night that somebody else was to take the post.

Seamus held very firm views on matters that sometimes diverged slightly from party policy, but there but for the grace of God go we all. *[Laughter.]* Members might remember back in the 2000s when the Alliance Party had decided to redesignate as unionist for a day. They all did — I was not here — except for Seamus. Seamus was for having none of that; he did not believe in it at all. He also had trouble with some of the social issues of the day: I will not go into that. He stuck to his beliefs, always. There was one thing about him: you always knew where you stood with him, because he would tell you, and he would tell you straight out. That applied to his friends as well as his so-called foes. However, he had no foes outside the Chamber; he just did not. His attitude was, "Leave it in the Chamber". No matter what was said or how vitriolic it got, you could have a cup of tea with Seamus afterwards or drain a wee brandy if you really wanted it.

I want to talk briefly about Seamus as the family man. He was married to Deirdre, who is in the Public Gallery today, for around 40 years. They have four lovely children: Christopher, Brian, Stephen and, of course, Natasha. When I first got to know him, around 1990, Natasha was very ill, as most of you will probably remember. She was suffering from a childhood leukaemia — an illness that did not spare many children. In fact, I think the survival rate was about one in five at the time. However, Natasha survived. She is now in her early 30s — a lovely young lady. She was blessed with a son two or three years ago, which is something that would have been in some doubt at a time because of what had happened to her during her childhood.

Seamus delighted in his family. He was the ultimate family man. While he could be quite scathing in his behaviour here and through politics, his attitude in the family was completely different. I know his son Brian, who may be in the Gallery as well, referred to him as a big "softie". I think that is going a bit far, but he was certainly a lovely family man. He took great pleasure in the family and also in his grandchildren, of which he had three: Rory, Thomas and Emily.

As a family, we shared some very good times with Deirdre and Seamus at weekends and on holidays over the years.

We came to be very, very good friends, and we will miss him, as will all of his colleagues. He had a wide family circle — all his friends in Lisburn and his friends here as well.

However, we have his legacy as an Alliance representative, a prominent politician and a supreme family man. That is the way I would like to remember him.

I will turn briefly to Ian Adamson, who I did not know very well but whose language skills and intellect I admired. I gather he knew maybe about a dozen languages fluently, including some that some of us had never heard of because they were very old languages. He knew about the history of language, and he could be very severe on our Irish-speaking colleagues because he thought that sometimes the Irish that they were speaking was not true Irish because they had not gone back 5,000 years to find the derivation of it.

He did not particularly favour the Alliance Party, to be honest, especially in his later years. He could be quite severe with us —.

Mr Storey: Hear, hear. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lunn: But that is politics. He was a decent man, and we miss him just the same. My abiding memory of him — I will finish with this, Mr Speaker — is that I made the trip to the Somme battlefields with the Somme Association a few years ago. Ian, who was a founder member of that association, was our guide for the time we were there. He sat at the front of the bus, and, in between every stop, he told us exactly where we had been and the history of it, where we were going and the history of it and probably what was coming up next. He was an absolute fund of knowledge about the battlefields, the First World War and, particularly, the details of the Somme.

I express my sympathy to everybody who was mentioned today, particularly to Ian's family and, of course, to Seamus's.

Mrs Cameron: Thank you for the opportunity to pay these tributes to the many Members who passed away in the last three years while this place has not been sitting.

I will be very brief. I just want to mention in particular Wilson Clyde, who was MLA for South Antrim. He was part of my beginnings in my political time with this party, the DUP. Wilson was a bit of a character. He was a farmer and a very proud unionist. He was incredibly loyal in every way, and that was in a very personal sense as well. I had the pleasure of working for him in his constituency office for a few years back in the 2000s. He always turned up with a smile on his face and was always ready to crack some really crummy joke. He was notorious for that. He was an incredibly honest gentleman, he was very loyal in character and he was very much a family man. I know he will be very much missed by his wife, Evelyn, and the entire family circle in the Randalstown and south Antrim area.

Mr Dallat: I am probably almost in a unique position in that I knew all these Members from my long service in this place. Obviously, I knew some better than others. My two party colleagues Donovan McClelland and P J Bradley I knew in particular, but there were others I knew from serving on Committees.

12.45 pm

Donovan McClelland was a lecturer in the University of Ulster. Life could have been very comfortable for him, but he did not choose that. He contributed to the peace process that eventually became the Good Friday Agreement and, in doing that, he brought himself danger. I remember being in his home on several occasions, which was fortified with high fences, bulletproof glass, deadlocks and all sorts of things. However, that was the contribution that he made, which has brought us to where we are today. Of course, you cannot mention Donovan without his wife, Noreen, who served in parallel on an adjacent council and who, today, makes a huge contribution. If I had one wish, it would be that Noreen would join the Assembly one day.

As you know, Mr Speaker — this will be of particular interest to you — Donovan was a Deputy Speaker, and he was a man of severe discipline. He did not suffer fools easily. On one occasion, there was a Member who was particularly troublesome in the morning. I reassure the existing parties that it was not one of their members. In the afternoon, Donovan was in the seat you are sitting in now, and, within 30 seconds, that Member was ejected. I am not sure if it was done according to the rules, but Donovan had had enough of him, and the Member got the message.

I served alongside P J Bradley on the Agriculture Committee, but he also lobbied me many times on behalf of the undocumented in America. I am glad that Sinéad has mentioned that, because that was important to a lot of people. His and Donovan's contributions were invaluable.

I know that Alliance Members and others have spoken about Seamus Close, and I am conscious that his wife Deirdre is here today. Seamus Close was an amazing individual, and I had the pleasure of serving on the Public Accounts Committee with him. He quickly became known as the Rottweiler, not because he went around biting ankles or things like that but because of the way he penetrated bad practice in Departments. I know that Seamus and other retired members of the Public Accounts Committee met for years after he retired to reminisce about the good old days when they sorted out the financial difficulties of the Assembly. Seamus will be sadly missed, and I wish to record my experience of working with him, particularly on the Public Accounts Committee. I know other Members appreciated it equally.

I could not resume my seat without making reference to Reverend Robert Coulter — Bob, as he allowed me to call him. He was an incredible person who had a vision for the future of the Assembly that went far beyond simply winning the next election.

When I was speaking about Donovan McClelland's difficult life, I neglected to say that I am so sorry that, in recent days, our First Minister and deputy First Minister have received threats. That was the type of life that Donovan McClelland lived in Randalstown in those years. Current Members of the Assembly should never forget that there were a lot of people who went before them and who made huge sacrifices and took enormous risks to bring this place to where it is today.

Mr Clarke: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to reflect on the Members who passed away during the time when the Assembly did not sit. Other Members have mentioned their party colleagues, and I want to talk in particular about my two party colleagues: Oliver Gibson

and about Wilson Clyde, who has already been described as a "proud unionist". I echo those comments, because Wilson was very proud of his unionist roots.

Wilson Clyde was from South Antrim, and he and I shared the townland of Groggan. He was one of the biggest encouragements for me to first put my name forward in 2005. When I was a young boy, Wilson's name was on the ballot paper and I was unable to vote for him, so Wilson had been about for a long time: over 20 years in local government and then, from 1998 to 2007, in the Assembly. Behind all that, as my colleague from South Antrim described, Wilson was a family man and a farmer. He spent much of his life building his farm, but, behind all that, he was a community man. He wanted to see the community thrive, and he worked in his community to do that. I pay tribute to Wilson and offer my sympathies to his wife, Evelyn, who has been left behind.

Wilson was a very active member of the party right up until he suffered poor health. He was still an active member of our party into his early 80s and was frequently seen at meetings. He was so loyal that he was probably one of the first ones to be seen there and one of the last ones to leave. That may be because, as my colleague said, he was still telling silly jokes at the end. Wilson was very dependable, and I pay tribute to him for that and for what he has done for the people of South Antrim.

Mr Butler: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I put on record my thanks to you for facilitating this moving tribute to former Members of the House. You could not sit here and not be moved by some of the remarks that have been made about former Members who, perhaps, operated in much more difficult, turbulent times than we find ourselves in. I am sure that we will note that we could do a lot better in the future learning from some of the instances of the past.

Before I talk about particular Members, I pay tribute to Sinéad Bradley for speaking so passionately about her father. Sinéad has probably made the most difficult tribute today, and it was fitting for her father. I put on record our regards at this difficult time to another Member for Lagan Valley, Pat Catney, who is burying his mother.

I am one of the new Members. I am not that young, but I did not get the privilege and chance to work with any of the people whom we have spoken of today. However, I had the chance to know two of them in different formats. I knew Rev Bob Coulter through his family. He leaves a legacy not only through his family, which is a credit to him, but through the Member for North Antrim, who is sitting here today thanks to Bob's guidance, and we will be forever grateful for that.

I am minded to pass on my personal respect for Seamus Close. Seamus was a politician in Lisburn when I was not interested in politics. I certainly may not have shared absolutely everything that he aspired to, but I can tell you, hand on heart, that I respected everything he stood for, because he was able to politic in a very mature way. I also knew Seamus — he would not have known it at the time — because his wife, Deirdre, shopped in the butcher's where I worked. There are connections that we do not even know that we have with people, but I knew of him through my admiration of him and through his wife Deirdre.

To close, Mr Speaker, the real reason for me rising is that, I think, the only time that I spoke to Seamus was about six months ago. He was having a meal with his wife

and another couple in Hillsborough, and we stopped. He stopped me, because he knew who I was, and I stopped him. We talked for five minutes and made a commitment that we would meet for coffee. I really looked forward to meeting Seamus for coffee, and the reality is that that coffee never happened, so I urge the Chamber to keep short accounts. If you have an appointment to make and you have someone that you need to meet up with, put it in your diary, guys, and make sure that it happens, because, like many, I will not get that chance to have coffee with Seamus.

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for making the time available to carry out the tributes today, some of which are, perhaps, more personal than others. I acknowledge what has been said by my colleagues about Oliver Gibson and Wilson Clyde, two men whom one had to respect.

I hope that the Ulster Unionist Party will forgive me and will not mind if I pay tribute to Dr Ian Adamson, whom I regarded as a personal friend, and I am sure that you did, too, Mr Speaker. We served together for many years in Belfast City Council, where he earned respect across the chamber for his abilities to communicate in an effective but very poignant and, indeed, jocular way, as has been mentioned. As a person, Ian was a man of great distinction. He was a great historian, the author of many books, a man of great intellect in his research work and, as already mentioned, a man who spoke many languages. Yet, he was a man who was extremely humble and could walk comfortably in the presence of kings and in the presence of the most humble. He had the ability to cross the Chamber and be friends, yet he was a strong unionist — a unionist with a capital “U” — and never at any stage did he forsake those unionist principles. He had the ability, as I said, to walk with the most high but also an ability to drill right down into matters affecting the community that we both served in the east of the city. Indeed, it was a privilege to be at meetings with Ian, and it was a good learning experience for me. Ian was interested in and a strong promoter of Ulster Scots, not just the language but the Ulster-Scots life and the Ulster-Scots times.

Many of us knew that Ian was ill, but his sad passing came more quickly than had been anticipated. When it is your time and a village is sealed off to hold the funeral, when the president of the Republic of Ireland makes the journey to that funeral, when you see the respect and silence during the entry of the remains to the church and, indeed, when, as the funeral procession takes place, there are 17 lifts of the coffin, you know that someone special has passed. I extend my sympathy to his wife, Kerry — many of you know that Ian married late in life — and, indeed, to his wider family.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the tributes to former Members who passed away during the past three years while the Assembly was not sitting. I also like take the opportunity, on behalf of Members, to extend all of our condolences to our colleague Pat Catney on the sad passing of his mother, Eileen.

Matter of the Day

Harry Gregg OBE

Mr Speaker: Claire Sugden has been given leave to make a statement on the death of Mr Harry Gregg OBE that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise in their place and continue to do so. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I remind Members that I will not take any points of order on this or any other matter until at least this item of business has concluded.

Ms Sugden: Today, we mourn the passing of Harry Gregg OBE, who passed away peacefully yesterday surrounded by family. I offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Carolyn, his family, friends and fans across the world.

Leading tributes today, Sir Alex Ferguson described him as:

“a man of great character and a true legend”.

Harry was our hero in so many ways. He was a hero on the football pitch — unrivalled. When he had the ball, it was safe in his hands, much to the dismay of the opposing side. In 1957, he was the world’s most expensive goalkeeper; a year later, he was voted the best. He made 25 appearances for Northern Ireland. He dominated the nets both in stature and talent. He was a reluctant hero. Following the 1958 Munich air disaster — over 60 years ago — he bravely rescued teammates and passengers, including a young baby.

He put aside concern for his own life to save others. People live today because of Harry Gregg.

1.00 pm

Harry did not want to talk too often about the tragedy, but it was clear that he carried the trauma for all of his days. He was the “hero of Munich”, but that name gave him no comfort. He is an inspirational hero. Harry’s legend is without doubt, and, long before he passed, when others sought to immortalise him in a sculpture, he spoke with unfiltered honesty against the idea; rather, he advocated for a foundation that aimed to inspire young people so that they might follow their dreams, as Harry was able to follow his. The Harry Gregg Foundation, which to this day attracts hundreds of children and young people each week, is his legacy.

Harry was full of character. His height and lean, straight frame and, usually, hat gave him such presence. I met him on a number of occasions. His candid conversations, sharp wit and incredible stories made him the best company. He talked about football and his family. He dearly loved his family, and I know that they will sorely feel his loss today and in the days ahead. Although incredibly humble, he was quietly proud of all his achievements. I know that some here have visited his home outside Castlerock. It is a sight to behold: a private collection of global football history.

Harry was a Coleraine man. Being born in Tobermore and raised on the Bann side gave him his most distinctive and formidable quality. Despite his success, fame and famous friends, he was one of us. To us, Harry Gregg OBE is a legend in every sense of the word, but, to him, he was Harry Gregg of 34 Windsor Avenue, Coleraine: a husband,

father and grandfather, and now a “Red Devil” in heaven. Rest easy, Harry, and God bless.

Mr M Bradley: It is with sadness that I remember former Northern Ireland and Manchester United goalkeeper Harry Gregg, who passed away on Sunday evening at the age of 87. Harry passed away peacefully in the Causeway Hospital surrounded by his loving family.

Harry survived the 1958 Munich air crash and was often referred to as the “hero of Munich”, after pulling passengers and teammates from the burning wreckage, including Bobby Charlton and Dennis Viollet. It was a tragedy in which 23 people died. Harry Gregg was a member of Sir Matt Busby’s team of talented youngsters, who were nicknamed the “Busby Babes”. Harry joined them from Doncaster Rovers for a then world-record fee for a goalkeeper of £23,000. On that fateful night of 6 February 1958, the plane carrying the team back from Belgrade crashed in a blizzard after refuelling at Munich. United were returning from a European game when the aeroplane in which they were travelling crashed while attempting to take off from a slush-covered runway. He escaped the burning wreckage but went back in and brought Vera Lukić, the pregnant wife of a Yugoslav diplomat, and her young daughter, Vesna, to safety. He also attended to Matt Busby and fellow Northern Ireland international Jackie Blanchflower. In an age in which the words “hero” and “legend” are banded about loosely, Harry was a true legend and a true hero. Not only was Harry a legend at Manchester United, where he kept 48 clean sheets during his nine years at Old Trafford but he starred for Northern Ireland at the World Cup in Sweden in 1958, helping Northern Ireland to reach the quarter-finals. He was named goalkeeper of the tournament. Harry used to tell me that, had Peter Doherty, the manager, registered himself to play in the competition, they could have won it, such was the regard that he had for Peter Doherty.

Harry was awarded an MBE in 1995, followed by an OBE in 2019. He was a straight talker. He told you it as he saw it. I spoke with him for the last time on Thursday. He recalled a visit that he had had from Arlene Foster as First Minister as one of his fondest memories. I loved listening to Harry, especially when he started to recount his football stories. He described them in such detail that you would nearly believe that you were there. He was a marvellous man to listen to, and I enjoyed his company.

I will continue with a quote from Harry from 2008:

“I’m Henry Gregg, 34 Windsor Avenue, who played football. Who was useful at it on good days and rubbish at it on bad days. That’s what I want to be remembered for — not something that happened on the spur of the moment.”

Harry will long be remembered for his love and passion for the game. He enjoyed watching young players coming through the Harry Gregg Foundation. To explain the breadth of that foundation, there are players there from Ballymena, Antrim, Dungiven, Limavady and all over the north-west and north-east of the Province who come down to Coleraine to take part every Saturday morning; it is a treat to watch. That is what Harry would like to be remembered for: his belief and passion for the game or, as he described it, “the beautiful game”. I extend all our deepest sympathies to his wife, Carolyn, son, John, daughters, immediate family and extended family circle.

Dr Archibald: I extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of sporting legend Harry Gregg, who died last night. Being from Coleraine and coming from a family of United fans, I grew up knowing about Harry Gregg. His story has inspired many from the local area as well as across the world. Harry's playing career started at Windsor Park Swifts, and he enjoyed spells at Linfield and Coleraine before moving to Doncaster Rovers at the age of only 18. However, it was his then record-breaking transfer fee for a goalkeeper of £23,000 to Manchester United that enabled Harry to showcase his talent. As one of the "Busby Babes", Harry cemented his reputation as one of the best goalkeepers in the world, keeping 48 clean sheets in 247 appearances during one of the club's most successful periods.

Harry survived the Munich air disaster in 1958, showing great bravery by returning to the plane to rescue teammates and other passengers, including a pregnant woman and small child. He returned to play only two weeks after the crash and kept a clean sheet. He went on to play for Northern Ireland at the 1958 World Cup, where he reached the quarter-finals and was voted the best goalkeeper at the tournament. His legacy will live on through the Harry Gregg Foundation, which was founded in 2015 and continues to help to inspire young people to get involved in football and to engage in an active lifestyle. My deepest sympathies go to Harry's family and friends. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Mr Dallat: I was in the privileged position of being a member of Coleraine council for over 30 years, and, if I was asked to highlight one of the greatest events I experienced during that time, I would say that it was meeting Harry Gregg. I am not into sport big time, but I am into sporting people who have made a huge contribution to this world. His sporting achievements have been well documented, and his heroism at Munich is known the world over. The fact that he came from Windsor Avenue, a working-class area of Coleraine, makes me particularly proud.

Harry Gregg was a working-class man, and, all through the most difficult years of the Troubles, he was well above the unsettled state that we survived in. My deepest sympathy to his family and to his friends. Windsor Avenue has lost a hero, Coleraine has lost an icon, and the world has lost someone who was very special not just to Manchester United and Northern Ireland but to the people as a whole. That is one of the reasons why Harry Gregg stands in such an elevated position: he was above politics, he was above sport, and he made a huge contribution to this world.

Mr Nesbitt: I will not pretend that I was some sort of bosom pal of Harry Gregg, but I had the honour and pleasure in equal measure of meeting him a few times, most recently during a visit to his home outside Castlerock with a small number of people, one of whom was Liam Beckett. If you know Liam and you knew Harry, you will understand that, after a rather promising start, when I got out the full word "Hello", it was something of a challenge to insert a third syllable into the next two hours of conversation. Joel Taggart was there that day, and I heard him on the BBC this morning saying Harry would be very cross if we started with Munich rather than concentrating on his football career. And what a career that was. Of course, we think of George Best as our greatest, but let us not underestimate how Harry Gregg became the most expensive goalkeeper in the history of world football

when Manchester United brought him to Old Trafford from Doncaster. Time after time, he showed us why, not just for his club but for his country.

Earlier today, Sammy McIlroy, the last of the "Busby Babes", said Harry had the courage of a lion. In the 1958 World Cup finals, he was voted goalkeeper of the tournament, outperforming the great Russian Lev Yashin, whom many still believe to be the greatest goalkeeper of all time. As somebody lucky enough to have commented on Northern Ireland the other two times they made World Cup finals, I think that it is easy to forget that, of the three, the '58 squad was probably the best. It made the quarter-finals of the World Cup in Sweden, a squad that included some of Northern Ireland's all-time greatest. There was Gregg himself, of course, Bertie Peacock, Peter McParland, Jimmy McIlroy, Billy Bingham and Danny Blanchflower. The FIFA all-star team of the tournament in 1958 contained six Brazilians, two Frenchmen, a Swede and two Northern Irishmen in the best team in the world: Harry Gregg and Danny Blanchflower. Blanchflower's brother, Jackie, was one of the Manchester United players whom Harry Gregg saved in Munich just a few months before.

"Only a fool would do what I did",

said Harry Gregg, but that belies a fundamental truth about him, which was identified by George Best, who said:

"On that occasion, it wasn't just an act of courage. It was acts of goodness."

Harry Gregg was a very good man. I can think of no country in the world that would not rejoice in saying, "He was a son of this country". Our condolences go to his family, his friends and to all his admirers, many of whom never knew him and never saw him play but respect him nonetheless. A good man has gone.

Mr Lyttle: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I pay tribute to the legendary Northern Ireland and Manchester United goalkeeper Harry Gregg. First and foremost, I offer my sincere condolences, thoughts and prayers to the Gregg family and hope that the tributes paid in the Assembly today go some way to offer some comfort for their loss.

Harry Gregg was a member of the legendary Manchester United "Busby Babes", playing 247 times for the club, and he is part of a rich heritage of Northern Irishmen who have graced the "theatre of dreams". He also played 25 times for Northern Ireland and, as mentioned, was a star of the 1958 World Cup. He was voted best goalkeeper in a side captained by Danny Blanchflower that reached the quarter-finals of the competition.

Harry will be remembered for his bravery during the Munich air disaster, when he courageously and without second thought helped to rescue teammates and survivors from the wreckage. As mentioned, Harry's reluctance to accept the recognition he received for that act gives some insight into the humility and humanity of the man and, indeed, into his determination to ensure that that tragic accident did not define his life or the life of his teammates. I think he can proudly recognise that he achieved that aim. Forever recognised as one of the greatest goalkeepers in the history of the beautiful game and loved by his family, Harry Gregg was an inspiration on and off the football pitch to so many.

Mr Allister: Northern Ireland has been blessed with many sporting giants not just in football but in many disciplines, but towering among them, undoubtedly, is Harry Gregg. All that has been said about him today in tribute is well deserved for his sporting achievements alone, but, of course, it is not just his triumph on the football field that made him the memorable son of this land of whom we are all proud.

It was also his triumph in the adversity of the Munich airfield, where he showed the selfless courage that most of us can only dream about. With no thought for his own safety, and thinking only of those who were in great peril, he conducted himself in a way that ensured that some people lived who otherwise would have died in the Munich disaster.

1.15 pm

Many of us — I suspect maybe all of us — in the Chamber have no recollection of the Munich disaster because it happened so long ago, yet it is embedded in the consciousness of us all. Why? Because of Harry Gregg. It was that selfless behaviour — that heroic behaviour — that made Harry Gregg one of whom we are all so proud, not just for his sporting prowess but for what he did on that occasion. Yet, through all that, as the House has heard, he was a man of immense modesty, self-effacing and looking nowhere for glory. I met him only once or twice, but it was a privilege to meet him and be in the presence of someone who so earned the respect of this country and whom we are all so glad was indeed a son of Northern Ireland. He was one of us; he lived amongst us; he came from us. He never forgot and was very proud of his roots. He was anxious to remind us all, quite properly, of where he came from. There were no airs and graces. He was straight up and down, straightforward, and exactly the sort of Ulsterman who personifies much of the greatness of this Province.

I want to add to the expressions of sympathy and condolence to his family and many friends. He will be much missed, but not forgotten.

Mr Robinson: First and foremost, I express my sincere sympathy to the family of local football legend Harry Gregg OBE. It was with huge sadness that I learned of the passing of a man who could be described only as a legend and a hero. I consider it a huge privilege to have personally known Harry and his passion for his hometown team, Coleraine Football Club, which, ironically, won the league cup the night before his untimely death.

Although Harry was much too modest a man to call himself a hero, this is simply the truth. During the awful events at Munich, which robbed the world of football of some of its rising stars, Harry Gregg put his own safety aside to try to rescue friends and colleagues. For me, that labelled Harry as a hero, even if he did not want that title. In the years after Harry became a legend of the Manchester United team, he was a hero, most of all, in his Northern Ireland home. He never saw himself as anything but Harry Gregg. That is what made him such a special individual.

While it is his family who will miss him the most, I hope that it will be of comfort to them to know how greatly appreciated Harry was as an individual throughout Northern Ireland and far beyond. Today, Northern Ireland has lost a gentleman, a sporting hero and an inspiration, but, through the Harry Gregg Foundation, his name will

live long in his native land. Again, I extend my deepest sympathy to all his family.

Ms Ennis: I thank Claire Sugden for bringing this Matter of the Day to the House, and to give us the opportunity to pay tribute to Harry. As a Manchester United fan, I, too, feel a sense of loss. I want to extend my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Harry Gregg.

Harry played for United during arguably one of the most successful periods in the club's history. He is considered one of the club's best ever keepers. Despite being known for his talent, as Members alluded to, Harry will always be remembered as one of the unsung heroes of the infamous Munich air disaster. Following the horrendous events of that ill-fated journey, Harry set about pulling people from the wreckage, without a thought for his own safety. We heard other Members allude to the fact that he rescued a pregnant mother and her other child, whom he later met. Harry also rescued the great Bobby Charlton, Jackie Blanchflower and his manager, Matt Busby, who was seriously injured.

By any standards, Harry Gregg was a hero, but he never sought any recognition for that, and he was a very private, extraordinarily ordinary person. He was a hero who wanted to be remembered for football. George Best best summed Harry up when he said:

"Bravery is one thing but what Harry did was about more than bravery. It was about goodness."

Harry Gregg was a good person.

Mr McNulty: Harry Gregg was a sporting icon. He was so much more than a sporting icon or a sporting man; he was a man of great dignity, humility and strength. He was a family man, touched by personal tragedy as well, with the loss of his first wife and his daughter through cancer. Harry was a "Busby Babe". I am a GAA man, but, in my formative years, I was also a Man U fan. I grew up admiring such players as Sammy McIlroy, Mal Donaghy and others and their exploits with the Northern Ireland team in Mexico '86. Sammy McIlroy said today that Harry was a man with the bravery of a lion, on and off the pitch. He was a man who, in 1958, climbed back into a burning aircraft in an effort to save his teammates' lives. Although Harry was a reluctant hero, what he did that night in Munich says everything you need to know about the man. Rest in peace, Harry. Condolences to his family, friends and fans.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Ms Martina Anderson be appointed as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure and as a member of the Committee for Justice. — [Mr O'Dowd.]

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

Resolved:

That Mr Gary Middleton replace Mr Harry Harvey as a member of the Committee on Procedures; and that Mr Harry Harvey replace Mr Gary Middleton as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. — [Mr K Buchanan.]

Committee Business

Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019: Prayer of Annulment

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed that there should be a single debate, during which Members should address both motions. Following the debate, I will put the question on each of the motions separately to the House.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That the Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/61) be annulled. — [Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).]

Motion not moved.

Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019: Prayer of Annulment

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That the Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/65) be annulled. — [Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).]

Motion not moved.

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

The sitting was suspended at 1.25 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Speaker: Members, it is time for questions to the Executive Office. We will start with listed questions. Questions 4 and 8 have been withdrawn. Topical questions 1 and 9 have been withdrawn. We have not been informed of any groupings.

Executive Subcommittee on Brexit: Update

1. **Mr Middleton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Executive subcommittee on Brexit. (AQO 110/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): Before I respond, I take the opportunity to acknowledge the passing of Harry Gregg, who died today. Harry was a great sporting icon and role model. My thoughts are with his family and friends at this time.

I am pleased to advise the Member that the Brexit subcommittee is firmly established and working to ensure that our interests are being protected and that we get the best deal for us. The subcommittee has met twice, and further meetings are scheduled over the coming days and weeks. At our first meeting, we received an update from officials on what they identified as the key challenges facing us. We also agreed a work schedule to ensure that we are focusing our efforts on the most appropriate areas, although it was recognised that our consideration of issues will be informed by the timetable of the negotiations processes. At our second meeting, we had a focused consideration of the issues around the movement of goods east-west and west-east. Given the importance of that issue, we will give further consideration to our position at the next meeting.

We also considered the implications for services North/South, as well as how we can appropriately engage with stakeholders in recognition of the established and ongoing stakeholder engagement undertaken by the various Departments. We also received a paper from officials on draft negotiating principles for the Executive that will be discussed in detail at our next meeting.

Mr Middleton: The deputy First Minister highlighted the importance of ease of trade east-west and west-east. The agri-food sector in Northern Ireland is crucial to our economy. Her party's position is that there should be no checks or infrastructure, but does she agree that, if there is an insistence that there be checks, they should not be done on this side of the Irish Sea?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not wish to see barriers east-west or North/South. We do not wish to see any kind of barrier to trade. We want to make sure that we have a prosperous economy and everybody has an opportunity to flourish. The Member mentioned the agri-food sector and its significance to our economy. We have to do everything that we can to protect the sector. The First Minister and I have written to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. I am

seeking clarity around some of the issues. We have a protocol that needs to be protected, but we also have to guard against the fact that we could come to the end of this year and still not have a deal. We need to protect our local interests. We are determined to work together, and we have sought clarity from Boris Johnson on a range of issues and hope to get a response in the weeks ahead.

Mr O'Toole: The Ireland protocol sets out a joint committee on the implementation of the protocol. It sets out a specialised committee that will report to the joint committee on the operation of the protocol. Once the protocol is operational, it envisages a joint consultative working group on the operation of the protocol. Have officials advised her or the First Minister of the membership of those committees and whether there will be Executive representation? If not, when will we find out?

Mrs O'Neill: We are working our way through the detail of all those things. The First Minister and I attended the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) meeting in Cardiff a few weeks ago, at which we raised those issues, including that of representation. The Executive voice needs to be heard as part of the discussions. How it is organised and how it will operate are not yet definitive, but suffice it to say that we will insist that our voice is heard and that we are part of the discussions at each stage of the negotiations. It is important, as negotiations move — we know that they can move very quickly — that our voice is heard and that we can adapt to be part of them. That is why we are meeting as an Executive subcommittee on Brexit every week. We are trying to get up to speed and to make sure that all Executive Ministers are involved in the discussions and decisions that we need to take.

Ms Anderson: Given the deep and genuine concerns and the widespread discussions that are taking place among a range of stakeholders representing the economy, social justice and constitutional change, plus rights advocates, such as trade unions and the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), will the Brexit subcommittee, in the context of participatory democracy, undertake engagements with such relevant stakeholders to listen, possibly learn and discuss their views on Brexit?

Mrs O'Neill: We absolutely recognise the importance of stakeholder engagement. Well-seasoned, long-established mechanisms are already in place to engage with stakeholders in each Department. The subcommittee aims to build on those. Each Department will continue to engage with its stakeholders, and the subcommittee will make arrangements to receive briefings from key stakeholders as it feels appropriate.

The subcommittee will keep stakeholder engagement under review, and we will consider detailed stakeholder events at certain points between the phases of the negotiations. We have to adapt to the process as it unfolds. At the last meeting of the Brexit subcommittee, officials committed to bringing forward proposals on stakeholder engagement for consideration, and that will build on the stakeholder engagement that is already established in each Department.

Mr Muir: Will the deputy First Minister give a guarantee that the Executive and all the Ministers will act faithfully to implement the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol?

Mrs O'Neill: The protocol is established. It is in place and is an integral part of the withdrawal agreement, so it has

to be adhered to. I am committed to making sure that that is the case. That is why we have a Brexit subcommittee: it is important that every party represented on the Executive is part of that. Our duty is to try to protect the interests and livelihoods of the people who live here and to ensure that citizens' rights are not diminished and that our economy can flourish. That includes the implementation of the protocol, making sure that we have everything in place that needs to be in place. There is still a danger that, at the end of the year, we could have a no-deal scenario.

Paramilitarism: Action Plan

2. Mr McGuigan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress on the Executive action plan for tackling paramilitarism. (AQO 111/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: While the Department of Justice takes the overall lead on coordinating the Executive-wide action plan for tackling paramilitarism, our Department has lead responsibility for delivering on four of the 38 actions in the plan. Good progress has been made on actions B1, B2 and B3. That includes the Civil Service implementing the employers' guidance, which sets out best practice in recruiting people with conflict-related convictions. Access to financial services and travel advice have also been improved. Specifically, in relation to action B4 — the communities in transition project — the Department is nearing the end of the process to appoint delivery partners to deliver individual projects across eight B4 areas. It is anticipated that all projects will be on the ground by April this year.

The New Decade, New Approach deal includes a renewed commitment from all parties to tackle paramilitarism and should be a priority in our revised Programme for Government. We look forward to working together across the Executive in support of this challenging and ambitious programme of work.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the joint First Minister for her answer. Will the Executive Office review the outworking of the plan to ensure increased community input and public confidence?

Mrs O'Neill: The previous Executive developed a cross-cutting action plan to deal with paramilitarism and organised crime, and that is constantly reviewed. The plan placed a focus on developing a range of criminal justice and community empowerment interventions to tackle paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

Dealing with criminality in all its manifestations requires a whole-community response, and I am acutely aware that people on the ground need to see, feel and experience change. As the basis for maximising public confidence, I am committed to working with all Executive colleagues and with those in public, civic and community life to ensure that no person is held back from realising their full potential as a consequence of paramilitarism or organised criminality in their community. Only by working together will we create a better future where there is no place for paramilitarism, criminality or organised crime in our communities.

Mr Speaker: I call Trevor Lunn.

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Speaker, but the Minister has already beautifully answered the question I was about to ask.

Mr Allister: I hope that it is agreed that it is important that the victims of paramilitarism should not be retraumatised. Does the deputy First Minister accept that the murder of Paul Quinn was a paramilitary killing? What steps has she therefore taken to require the Finance Minister to publicly acknowledge that Paul Quinn was not a criminal?

Mrs O'Neill: Conor Murphy has unreservedly condemned the murder of Paul Quinn. The people who murdered Paul Quinn are criminals and need to be brought to justice. He has called on anyone with information on the murder to bring it to the Gardaí or the PSNI. I know that Conor very much regrets the comments that he made in the aftermath of Paul's murder. He has apologised for his remarks unreservedly. He has withdrawn his remarks, and his apology was heartfelt and sincere. He has offered to meet the Quinn family at a time and place of their convenience, as has Mary Lou McDonald.

Mr Allister: He has not said —.

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Justin McNulty.

Mr McNulty: I acknowledge the presence of two incredibly brave people in the Public Gallery today: Breege and Stephen Quinn. I was pleased to see the First Minister and the deputy First Minister at the meeting of the Executive Office Committee confirm that, in their view, Paul Quinn was not a criminal. Will the deputy First Minister confirm that that view is held by all Ministers in the Executive, including the Finance Minister, Conor Murphy?

Mrs O'Neill: Again, I have said very clearly that Conor has apologised for his remarks and has unreservedly withdrawn them and that his apology was heartfelt and sincere. I believe the best place to deal with these issues, which are very sensitive — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, please, in the Chamber.

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that the best way to deal with these issues, which are very sensitive — we are talking about a mother who has been hurt; I, as a mother, cannot even begin to understand how you deal with that trauma — is on a one-to-one basis, and Conor Murphy is very happy to meet Breege Quinn at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Beattie: Given that the funding for the action plan on tackling paramilitarism, organised crime and criminality is due to end at the end of the 2020 financial year, will the deputy First Minister outline what discussions she has had with the Finance Minister about that plan and the funding for it carrying on?

Mrs O'Neill: We have not had any discussions with the Finance Minister on that yet. We are looking at all these things, and we have a scheduled meeting with the Finance Minister to discuss our priorities in the Executive Office. As we approach the Budget, we hope to get positive outcomes across the whole range of issues, not least funding for that area of work.

Ms Bunting: Does the deputy First Minister agree that, in circumstances where departmental agencies and arm's-length bodies afford access to these people in another role, they afford credibility to those who have been engaged and that, therefore, permits them to maintain coercion and control in areas where the tackling paramilitarism programme is trying to reduce all such influence? In circumstances where the Parades Commission, the Housing Executive, the councils and the

police continue to meet these people, it affords them a status, a credibility and an access that the average citizen is not afforded.

Mrs O'Neill: We all have a duty — we, as an Executive, have that duty — to bring forward work that allows communities to transition and makes sure that nobody is held back, that we lift communities up and that we create distractions to make sure that young people are not drawn towards those elements in society. Nobody should be held back, so, if there are particular issues around arm's-length bodies that the Member wishes to write to me about, I am more than happy to receive that.

Civil Service Reform

3. **Mr McHugh** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Civil Service reform set out in *New Decade, New Approach*. (AQO 112/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: We are very mindful of the commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, including the commitment towards further reform of the Civil Service. Officials will bring forward proposals for the establishment of a dedicated programme to coordinate and drive forward that work in a formal and structured way. Civil Service reform will require discussion by the Executive, and we will keep Members updated as that work is taken forward.

Mr McHugh: Will the review of the Civil Service be independent and draw on best practice?

Mrs O'Neill: Part 1 of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document refers to "further reform" of the Civil Service. The Executive have not yet determined how they wish to see that taken forward. There are priority themes underpinned by actions that are interlinked, and they would, in my view, be key principles going forward: leadership from within the Civil Service at all levels and from Ministers; collaboration; working across all Departments and Ministers; a high-performing Civil Service; an outcomes-focused Civil Service that is well placed to deliver on our Programme for Government commitments; an inclusive, dynamic and innovative workforce in which diversity is truly valued; and a great place to work that can attract new and young talent. Those are the aims that we and, I am sure, all of us want to support and build on.

2.15 pm

Mr McGrath: Given that a review often means a reduction in staff and extra responsibility for those that are in place, and recognising the fact that there is a current Civil Service pay dispute, what action is the deputy First Minister and the whole Executive undertaking to ensure that we value our Civil Service staff and that we pay them a decent wage?

Mrs O'Neill: I know that the Finance Minister has been engaging with Civil Service side in relation to the pay dispute, and we hope to get to the point where we have a positive resolution. We must value our staff; we must invest in our staff. That is really important. The Chair of the Committee asked that question, and I want to work with the Chair around the proposals that we are going to develop in due course around how we can reform and do better in the Civil Service.

Attorney General: Recruitment Plans

5. **Ms Bailey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the current tenure of the Attorney General is due to expire in June 2020, what plans are in place to fill this post. (AQO 114/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: We are aware that the Attorney General's term of appointment will expire on 30 June and recently met with him to discuss various issues. We are currently considering the position and will provide an update to the Executive in due course.

Ms Bailey: To follow on, I would like to ask the question that has been unanswered so far by the First Minister and deputy First Minister: do they have any concerns about potential conflicts of interest in relation to the Attorney General's office, given his recent appointment as a temporary deputy High Court judge?

Mrs O'Neill: I am assuming that the Member is referring to a question for written answer, and perhaps she has not received the answer yet, but I am happy to respond. We are aware of the potential conflict of interest that could arise between the role of the Attorney General and the role of temporary High Court judge. The temporary High Court judge application process provided for a conflict of interest declaration where applicants were required to declare interests and potential conflicts.

I also understand that, at the point of deployment in each case, the potential temporary High Court judge to be allocated will be assessed individually by the Lord Chief Justice on a case-by-case basis. The First Minister and I are keen to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest or perceptions of conflicts of interest that may undermine the Attorney General's office or the Executive.

Mr G Kelly: Will you go into some detail as to the process of recruitment for the new Attorney General?

Mrs O'Neill: The appointment of the Attorney General is legislated for by the Justice Act 2002. The legislation determines that the Attorney General is appointed by the First Minister and myself acting jointly, and we are currently looking at options on how best to take that forward.

Mr McGlone: Does the Minister agree that the changes to the guidance of the office of Attorney General need to be reviewed to ensure that there is no potential for conflict or, indeed, any influence, political or otherwise, on the scope, role or work of that office?

Mrs O'Neill: In the previous answer, I said that we have to get to a point where there are no conflicts of interest, real or perceived, so we need to look at all those things. In the current guidance that is at play, we will be able to look at all those things around an appointment process if and when we replace the Attorney General.

Mr Lunn: The Minister is being very coy about hiding behind procedure and so on. Does she agree with me that it is an absolutely clear conflict of interest for somebody to hold the position of Attorney General and also be a High Court judge? This should not be allowed to proceed. It should be stopped at source.

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure that the Member will agree that we should not just throw caution to the wind and just go with our guts. We need to follow process, and I am determined to follow process. That is why we have sought additional

information around the conflict of interest. Once I am satisfied about that, we will be more than happy to move forward and take new action.

Mr Stalford: Does the deputy First Minister agree that it is absolutely imperative that any appointment process to replace the Attorney General is not meddled with by politicians trying to make political points?

Mrs O'Neill: I agree that any public appointment process needs to follow the due process. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members.

Civic Advisory Panel

6. **Ms Kimmins** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress in relation to the appointment of a compact civic advisory panel. (AQO 115/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The compact civic advisory panel will be reconstituted through a public appointments process, which will be scheduled for completion within the six-month period as required by the New Decade, New Approach deal. There will be an important role for the panel in advising the Executive on approaches to engagement on complex policy issues. An important initial task is, therefore, to review the existing remit of the compact civic advisory panel and to design a specification for the role of panel members to set out the qualities and experience we will be seeking from potential candidates. In the light of the panel's remit to convene one citizens' assembly each year, we will also look at good practice elsewhere.

Ms Kimmins: I thank the joint First Minister for her response. Given the challenges facing the Executive, how will issues be prioritised to ensure maximum strategic benefit from the panel's work?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is right that there are many issues facing the Executive, not least the budgetary situation. That said, it is essential that the Executive's decision-making is as informed as it can be. In going forward, it is essential that the Executive listen to, engage with and work with the broadest range of stakeholders. Members of the compact civic advisory panel will bring an expertise and an insight that can only but inform the work of the Executive. It also evidences a step change in how we now do government. On that note, I want to encourage as many people as possible who feel that they have the skills to apply. It is essential that we see an advisory panel that is reflective of all our society in all its diversity.

Mr Stewart: When the panel was announced in December 2016, the Executive Office stated:

"The panel will consider specific strategic issues relevant to the Programme for Government and report to the Executive."

Given that the deputy First Minister has had three years to think about this, what are the top three strategic issues that she would like the panel to consider?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will know that, yes, it was put in place in 2016, but, because the Assembly did not sit, the work was not progressed, so we collectively have a job of work to do. We are a collective Executive. We are a five-party coalition, so the five parties need to sit down and discuss what issues we can consider and what will be the first item that the compact civic advisory panel could

take forward. The panel that we nominate and put forward will also have ideas, so it is time for a wee bit of outside thinking. If we are going to demonstrate that the Assembly is in a new mode and that we are working in a different way, we need to work together as a five-party Executive.

NSMC/BIC: Future Meetings

7. **Ms Dolan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an indicative time frame for the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. (AQO 116/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council is planned to take place after the formation of a new Irish Government. The next scheduled summit meeting of the British-Irish Council will be hosted by the Scottish Government in June.

Ms Dolan: I thank the joint First Minister for her answer. Will the Executive Office ensure that the implications of Brexit are addressed as part of the ongoing work of those bodies?

Mrs O'Neill: The UK's withdrawal from the EU and the practical application of the withdrawal agreement will have implications for North/South cooperation as defined under strand two of the Good Friday Agreement. They are not specifically issues that can be addressed solely through the North/South Ministerial Council. However, as has already been identified within the agreed protocol, as part of the withdrawal agreement, it is envisaged that the NSMC and the North/South implementation bodies will play their role. The practicalities and the outworkings of the protocol, of course, still need to be considered and will be included on the agenda for discussion at relevant NSMC meetings. New Decade, New Approach commits the Brexit subcommittee to initiate an assessment of the impact of Brexit on the institutions North/South and on east-west relationships. Consideration of that issue has been included in its forward work programme. I am of the view that the North/South Ministerial Council meetings will present an opportunity for Ministers North and South to discuss Brexit issues that may impact on their agreed area of cooperation.

Mr Allister: If the ungovernable Irish Republic ever obtains a Government and if Sinn Féin is part of that Government, when it comes to the North/South bodies, will the deputy First Minister have the same concerns of imbalance that she and her party expressed in regard to perceived DUP influence on the Conservative Government? If it turns out that her party is sitting on both sides of the table in the North/South bodies, will she then have any concerns about balance or was that just faux outrage?

Mrs O'Neill: Given his legal profession, you would think that the Member would be more in tune with the political situation. The very different situation in terms of the DUP's confidence-and-supply deal was the fact that the British Government have jurisdiction here but the Irish Government do not. I would have thought that your legal mind would have picked up on that.

I see no contradiction whatsoever in power-sharing and making the Assembly and Executive work; and, at the same time, articulating my ideological position of a united Ireland. There is no contradiction in that whatsoever. Let me also say this: no one has anything to fear from the future or from political change on this island.

Well-being and Resilience Working Group

9. **Ms Flynn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they will contribute to the Executive's working group on mental well-being and resilience. (AQO 118/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: In recognition of the importance of its work, the First Minister and I will attend meetings of the working group on mental well-being, resilience and suicide prevention. Our Department, through funding programmes such as Urban Villages and Communities in Transition, supports a wide range of projects that contribute to the mental well-being and resilience of young people and adults. We hope to be able to contribute insights through the experience of those programmes and share models of good practice.

Ms Flynn: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the working group give a commitment that it will help to fully implement the 'Protect Life 2' suicide prevention strategy and to secure the cross-departmental working that is required to reduce the problem and prevent people from suffering with mental health problems and suicidal ideation?

Mrs O'Neill: First, I acknowledge the good work of the Member on this issue; she has been a champion on mental health issues. The First Minister and I are committed to working with Executive colleagues to ensure that there is maximum cross-departmental working to reduce the problem, to prevent people from suffering with mental health problems and to provide support at the point of need.

As a former Health Minister, I am very aware of the scale of the problem. I am also acutely aware that so many across society live with mental ill health, as so tragically reflected in our worrying levels of suicide, self-harm and substance abuse. Many in the Chamber, and their families, have also been touched by the issue. The clear commitment from the Executive to each and every person is that your mental health is valued, that you are valued and that you are not alone. Therefore, the First Minister and I are committed, along with Executive colleagues, to making sure that we work continuously to maximise cross-departmental working.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, I am sure that everyone will welcome the collaborative approach by the Executive to tackling mental ill health. Of course, it is important to get upstream because many know the contributing factors. What additional budget will we expect to see next week going to mental ill health and tackling the causes of it?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have a specific figure, mostly because that work will come under the remit of the Department of Health. However, we will all input into it; we have focused an Executive priority on it. I mentioned a number of programmes across our Department that contribute to trying to promote mental well-being, such as Urban Villages and Communities in Transition. As we know, poor mental health arises as a result of a combination of factors, so we need a whole-society, cross-departmental approach to be able to deal with it. I am quite sure that, if you wrote to the Minister of Health, he could give you the actual figure.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister will be aware that, in 'Protect Life 2', the target is a reduction of 10% in suicides over a specific period, and that is based on World Health Organization guidelines. Does the Minister accept that that

is, effectively, applying an industry norm to an incredibly abnormal situation and that the only acceptable target is zero suicides?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree about zero suicides. We have to do everything that we can to support people who find themselves living with mental ill health. It is also a fact — I am quite sure that the Member is aware of this — that many who die by suicide are not known to mental health services; they have never sought support, so there is a societal problem that we need to address. We need to encourage people to say that it is OK not to feel OK and that it is OK to ask for help. That is a collective responsibility that we have as elected representatives, along with the professionals who work on the ground, supporting and counselling people.

Mr Humphrey: I agree with the comments that the Minister has just made. I welcome the joined-up approach across government to this hugely difficult issue. It is important that Departments here, working with the likes of the Public Health Agency, councils and service providers, come together and get a strategy to deal with the issue across Northern Ireland.

As a governor of two schools, I know that a huge amount of front-line education money in the budget of schools is being used to buy in professional help. I ask the Minister that her Department and those across government look at that issue and allow education moneys to be spent on education.

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to take that issue up with the Minister of Education.

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to the 15 minutes for topical questions.

Anti-poverty Strategy: Update

T2. **Miss Woods** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the anti-poverty strategy that the Executive have committed to develop and implement in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. (AQT 82/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: It is still in the early stages of development. I am happy to write to the Member to give her more detail. Sorry, it is remiss of me not to welcome the Member to the Chamber. This is the first time that I have had a chance to engage with her.

We have to be serious about tackling poverty, and, again, a holistic approach has to be taken. I am determined to make sure that we get the strategy delivered within the time frame set out in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document.

Miss Woods: I thank the Minister for her answer. Paragraph 4.11 on page 30 of 'New Decade, New Approach' states clearly that the future strategic-level programme and the anti-poverty strategy:

"will be underpinned by a budget and be ready for Executive sign-off and endorsement by the end of March 2020."

Given that, will the deputy First Minister give a clear timescale for the anti-poverty strategy, including any consultation, or will it be a copy-and-paste exercise from

previous Executive promises that ignores the advice and recommendations from those working in the sector?

Mrs O'Neill: I give the Member an assurance that it will not be that. We have an opportunity to demonstrate a different style of politics, and that is what we are committed to doing. I also believe very strongly in consulting experts in the sector who are delivering on the ground. As we develop all our Programme for Government commitments, we need to make sure that we have a proper consultation and that we resource the pledges that we make to the public, because there is no point having a lovely document that sits on a shelf but that cannot be translated into something that makes a difference to people's lives.

Pension Scheme: Victims and Survivors

T3. **Dr Archibald** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what engagement they have had with the NIO on the development of the regulations for a pension scheme for those who were seriously and physically injured during the conflict. (AQT 83/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: I am fully committed to providing for those who were seriously and physically injured during the conflict in an inclusive manner. On the victims' pension issue specifically, I have had no discussion with the NIO on the development of the regulations for the scheme.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is the resource for the victims' pension coming from the block grant?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, I have had no input into the development of the regulations, which very much came from the NIO. The policy was designed in Westminster, and it is my firm view that it should also be funded from Westminster.

Omagh Bomb: Public Inquiry

T4. **Mr McCrossan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that they may have seen the 'Lost Lives' documentary on BBC 1 last night, which highlighted the Omagh bomb, among other atrocities, and in the light of the fact that the families of the victims are still waiting on justice for that most heinous of acts, whether their office will support the efforts of those families to have a full public inquiry into that atrocity as part of any agreed resolution to deal with the legacy of the past. (AQT 84/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: I did not see the programme last night, but we have to deal with the past in a way that is inclusive and that allows victims to move forward. We have to deal with the past in the way that we all agreed to in the Stormont House Agreement five years ago, which we are yet to see implemented. We have a commitment in 'New Decade, New Approach' to legislate within 100 days, and when we meet the new Secretary of State this week we intend to raise the issue with him.

I am more than happy to do whatever I can to support the Omagh families in receiving justice and getting access to what is important, because anybody who lost a loved one or was hurt during the conflict deserves to be supported in a way that is important to them.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the deputy First Minister for her answer. She will know very well that, some years after the bomb, Omagh and its people, its community and

its town are still suffering from that devastating event, which took the lives of so many innocent people and has haunted Omagh ever since. Will the deputy First Minister consider joining the First Minister in visiting Omagh to meet community groups and seek out some funding to support the regeneration of Omagh town, which has still not recovered from that dreadful event?

Mrs O'Neill: Both I and the First Minister are keen to get out to meet communities and engage with people. We are determined to do that as much as we possibly can. I am more than happy to continue engaging with the Member and others on the regeneration of Omagh, and west of the Bann in general, because there is a need to tackle regional disparities that have existed for many years. We are determined to do that, and that is why it is referenced in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document.

Regional Trauma Service: Update

T5. **Mr Robinson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of a new mental trauma service for victims. (AQT 85/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: Discussions are ongoing between the different stakeholders on implementing changes to the regional trauma network's (RTN) governance structures to ensure that the voluntary and community sector groups for victims and survivors are better represented at all levels of the RTN governance structures. The RTN will deliver a comprehensive regional trauma service, building on existing resources and expertise in the statutory sector and in the voluntary and community sector. The network will focus on those who have experienced trauma and are suffering from PTSD, and we hope that phase 1 of the service will be launched in the coming months.

Mr Robinson: Will the deputy First Minister give a time frame for victims to benefit from this new service?

Mrs O'Neill: It is still in progress. We hope that phase 1 will be launched in the coming months. I do not have an exact date for the Member, but I am more than happy to keep him up to date on progress.

Victims and Survivors: TEO Engagement

T6. **Mr McAleer** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to give a commitment to engage with the groups representing victims and survivors throughout west Tyrone, Omagh and other districts. (AQT 86/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: I am more than happy to continue to engage with all groups, and it is important that we listen to the needs of all victims and that we engage and show leadership. I am happy to take the Member up on that.

Mr McAleer: I join with the Member who asked a question earlier in requesting the deputy First Minister to come west of the Bann to the Omagh and Strabane districts to meet many groups, particularly those who deal with the needs of victims and survivors.

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to do that.

Paul Quinn

T7. **Dr Aiken** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, after paying tribute to Breege and Stephen Quinn and the rest of the Quinn family, and since the Assembly

is in a new mode, with the First Minister and deputy First Minister's focus on victims and survivors, whether the deputy First Minister has asked her Finance Minister to state publicly, as the Quinn family has asked, that Paul Quinn was not a criminal and, if she has not done so, to state why not. (AQT 87/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: As I already said, Conor Murphy has apologised for his remarks and unreservedly withdrawn his remarks. His apology was heartfelt and sincere, and he has offered to meet the Quinn family. I think that that is the best way to proceed.

Dr Aiken: I thank the deputy First Minister for her answer. As the deputy First Minister knows, Ministers are bound by the ministerial code, particularly the Pledge of Office, which in paragraph 1.4 (cg) and paragraph 1.4 (ci) refer particularly to paramilitarism and paramilitary attempts to control communities. As the Finance Minister has previously stated that he spoke to the IRA, will he now give that information to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána? If he does not, will the deputy First Minister agree that the Minister of Finance would then be in breach of the code and would have him stand down?

Mrs O'Neill: No, I will not. The Minister is not in breach of the ministerial code. He has previously spoken to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána, and has called on anyone who has information to bring it forward to both parties.

Social Investment Fund: Spend

T8. **Ms Dolan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund spend to date. (AQT 88/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The social investment fund aims to make life better for people living in targeted areas by reducing poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. The fund will run up until March this year. The full £80 million budget has been committed to a total of 65 projects across the nine SIF zones. These include 46 capital projects, which are delivering improvements to 107 premises, and 19 revenue projects. To date, 34 capital projects and 17 revenue projects have completed and are delivering the benefits to the local communities. Total spend to date is £72 million, of which £35 million is capital and £37 million is revenue.

Ms Dolan: I thank the Minister for her answer. What outcomes have been identified from the SIF projects?

Mrs O'Neill: The full impact of the projects will take longer to evaluate, but, so far as we know, over 45,000 people have benefited from the revenue projects: over 5,000 people through employment and training; over 28,000 people through early intervention; and over 12,000 people through projects focused on education. The physical improvements in the capital projects will continue to benefit communities for years to come.

Minority Ethnic Development Fund

T10. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the minority ethnic development fund. (AQT 90/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The budget for the minority ethnic development fund is just over £1.2 million. Funding awards run from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Sixty-nine

applications were received to the 2019-2020 fund, and 38 were successful. The fund continues to be a key element of our policy for racial equality and good race relations in our society. It is intended to be aligned with and support our racial equality strategy, which runs from 2015 to 2025. The fund continues, and will continue, to support voluntary and community organisations to address the needs of people from ethnic backgrounds, including the Travelling community.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Minister outline the type of projects involved or, indeed, how funding is applied to each of the organisations that are currently funded?

Mrs O'Neill: Funding awards fall into three broad categories or tiers. Tier 1 covers smaller amounts of up to £10,000. They may be for one-off events or for projects lasting up to one year. Tier 2 covers amounts of between £10,000 and £45,000 per annum. Funding is intended to meet central management, development and administrative costs to enable organisations to develop and provide services and projects. Tier 3 covers awards between £45,000 and £75,000 per annum. Similar to tier 2, funding in that category is intended to meet central management, development and administrative costs to enable organisations to develop and provide services and projects. However, tier 3 applications must also include clear proposals to provide a mentoring role with smaller or less-experienced organisations and/or to work collaboratively with others in the sector.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. As the next period for questions does not begin until 2.45 pm, I suggest the House takes its ease for a couple of minutes.

2.45 pm

Justice

1. **Mr Stewart** asked the Minister of Justice, following the announcement in 2012 of a review of sentencing guidelines for convictions of murder, to outline any subsequent changes to the tariffs for mandatory life sentences. (AQO 124/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): The ministerial commitment of the time was to a wider review of the legislation governing the determination of tariffs for mandatory life sentences. In Northern Ireland, a person guilty of murder must receive a life sentence, and the sentencing judge must set an appropriate tariff. The tariff is the minimum period the person must remain in prison before being considered for release by the independent Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (PCNI).

The tariff is determined by the judge considering sentencing guidance, generally from judgements delivered by our Court of Appeal. Sentencing guidance is distinctly different from "sentencing guidelines" or a statutory structured approach for tariff setting as exists in England and Wales. The Department initiated a review of sentencing policy in 2017 and undertook a public consultation on a wide review of sentencing issues, including whether approaches to tariff setting that occur elsewhere should be developed in Northern Ireland, in October 2019. The consultation closed on 3 February with over 200 responses having been received. The responses are being considered.

Mr Stewart: I welcome the Minister to her position and wish her the best of luck in the years ahead. I appreciate that she is only one month into post, but she will know that both her predecessors announced reviews of sentencing tariffs for murders. Does she agree that it is an absolute disgrace that, in 2017, the average sentence for a murder in Northern Ireland was 11 years and 4 months, some 10 years less than the equivalent in England and Wales? When is Northern Ireland going to lose its reputation for being soft on murderers?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, and I want to say a few things in answer to his question.

First, it is worth considering that there is no major disparity in sentencing guidance covering such offences and tariffs between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The tariff is the first point where someone may ask for parole to be considered, but it is not, if you like, automatic that the person will be released from custody.

Secondly, it is very difficult to do the comparative analysis that the Member is suggesting could take place, because, due to the small number of cases in Northern Ireland, very small differences in sentencing can skew the results. We will be considering whether or not we need to go for a more structured sentencing approach in light of what has come back from the consultation. However, when this was last considered, significant value-for-money concerns were raised in the responses. Those two things do need to be balanced.

Mr Givan: Again, I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time.

In evidence that the Chief Constable gave to the Justice Committee, he indicated a concern about the lack of deterrent value in the current legislation for assaults on police officers. Can the Minister look at this area to provide additional protection by way of deterrent value?

Secondly, in respect of murder, we recognise that police officers and prison officers represent all of us. An attack on them is an attack on democracy. Is the Minister in favour of introducing whole-life sentences so that, when those individuals are murdered, life actually means life?

Mrs Long: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his question. First, the review that was undertaken was of tariffs for mandatory life sentences, so that has already gone ahead. On the issue of wider sentencing, there is an issue of aggravated offences that needs to be considered. There are a number of different ways that people can be judged for murder, because some are whole-life sentences, some are indeterminate, some are determinate and some have tariffs applied.

If the Member would like more detail, I am happy to write to him with more information about how it is applied. However, I do not want anyone to go away from the Chamber feeling that, in any way, there is a huge disparity between the sentencing in Northern Ireland and sentencing elsewhere. It has to be borne in mind that we have a very small number of such offences in any one year. Therefore, the much larger pool of offences in England and Wales means that very small changes in Northern Ireland can produce big anomalies in the comparative analysis. People need to be careful about drawing the comparison out too far.

Mr Beattie: Given that Westminster has just brought in legislation to fill a gap in terrorist laws, can the Minister outline the engagement that her Department had with the Northern Ireland Office on the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill that saw Northern Ireland omitted from the Bill?

Mrs Long: Yes, I can. With respect to the provisions that have been made in Westminster under the emergency legislation, we consulted with the Ministry of Justice and the Northern Ireland Office and indicated that, whilst there were a number of issues about how sentences are constructed in Northern Ireland and, specifically, about any retrospectivity that might be incurred as a result of the changes proposed in Westminster, there was no barrier to the legislation being applied UK-wide. We made it clear that that was our preference. Indeed, in a conversation with the Justice Minister for England and Wales, Robert Buckland, I made it clear that that was my preference, because I was concerned about the risk of a two-tier system of approach being set up in the UK when it comes to the paroling of terrorist prisoners.

At the end of the day, the decision was taken by the Ministry of Justice. It is not a decision for the Department of Justice here. The decision was to exclude Northern Ireland from that. Our first sight of that decision was the press release about the legislation that was issued by the Ministry of Justice. There will be other opportunities for Northern Ireland to be included in the counterterrorism Bill that is about to come through Westminster, so the door, if you like, has not completely closed on that chapter. I have written to the Ministry of Justice and to Robert Buckland to make it clear that, in future, we expect a higher level of exchange of information between Departments before announcements of that gravity are made.

Ms Sheerin: Does the Minister intend to review the structure of the Lord Chief Justice's sentencing group?

Mrs Long: The Lord Chief Justice's sentencing group was set up in 2016 to provide guideline cases that could then be considered as part of the overall consideration that judges would make when they were doing sentencing. In addition to the legal members on the panel, lay members were added in, I think, 2018. At the moment, whilst we continue to review its operation, there are no firm proposals for change.

Mr McGlone: Many answers have already been forthcoming, so I ask the Minister to bear with me and give me some latitude. Is the Minister prepared to review sentencing for the offence of death by dangerous driving?

Mrs Long: First, I thank the Member for raising the issue, because it has been a major feature in the recent consultation. I am aware, obviously, that there was particular public interest in that, as a result of the accident involving Enda Dolan, where he died as a result of quite an appalling case. First, I express my sympathy to Peter Dolan and his wife, Niamh, for the experience that they have had since Enda was killed in 2014. I know that they have been looking, as part of the sentencing review, to see whether there is a possibility of having a view on the maximum sentencing for death by dangerous driving. As you will appreciate, I cannot prejudge the outcome of the consultation. We need to look at all the responses being analysed. I have to say that a significant number relate to that particular offence. I express my thanks to the

Dolan family for their efforts, which clearly highlighted the consultation and encouraged the public to get involved in that and to send very detailed responses on those matters that we are now considering.

Mr Allister: Can I take the Minister back to Mr Beattie's question? Is she saying to the House that there is no opportunity for her Department or the Executive to bring in legislation altering the parole provisions and when they kick in, in respect of terrorist offences?

Mrs Long: Terrorist offences are for the UK Government to legislate on because they are a reserved matter. However, there is, of course, the opportunity for us to look at when parole kicks in with respect to those offences. As I said in answer to Doug Beattie's question, the issue is that this was driven by an imperative in England and Wales with respect to a particular issue that was arising. When the MOJ introduces UK-wide legislation on counterterrorism later in the spring, there will be an opportunity to address the wider issues, including the one that the Member raised. It is my hope that, at that stage, we will have better engagement with the MOJ, the Department of Justice and the NIO to ensure that we regularise what has become an anomaly in the system. However, I am clear that it is our preference that the UK-wide approach to this is consistent and that a two-tier system — one administered in Northern Ireland and one administered in the rest of the UK — does not develop.

Mr Stalford: I welcome the Minister to her place and wish her well in her new role. Does she agree that whilst always wanting to be merciful and allow people the opportunity of redemption, there are some crimes that are so despicable that life should mean life, specifically the murder of a child? I am sure all Members will agree that, as part of any review of sentencing policy, anyone who engages in such a heinous act should spend the rest of their days in prison.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his point. A number of elements have to be considered by judges when they are deciding on the tariff to apply in life sentence cases. However, to be clear, if someone commits murder in Northern Ireland, they will automatically receive a life sentence. The tariff is not the point at which someone is released on parole; it is the first point at which they can apply to be released on parole. Therefore, even someone who is given a life sentence with a relatively low tariff can continue to remain in prison if the parole commissioners judge that that person remains a threat to society.

Legacy Issues: Legislation

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Justice whether departmental officials are in contact with their counterparts in the NIO regarding the commitment to publish and introduce legislation in the UK Parliament to address legacy issues. (AQO 125/17-22)

Mrs Long: Since the New Decade, New Approach deal, my officials have spoken to their Northern Ireland Office counterparts on several occasions, and we await formal meetings to discuss the next steps towards the publication and introduction of the promised legislation. In the period following the completion of the Northern Ireland Office's public consultation on its draft Stormont House Agreement Bill, departmental officials and relevant justice bodies participated in a series of meetings with Northern Ireland Office officials. These were intended to inform the Northern Ireland Office's thinking on how it might respond

to the consultation responses and the implications of any proposed changes to the Bill. I assure Members that my officials and I remain ready and committed to working with the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Office to progress the necessary legislation.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for her answer and wish her well in her new post. What preparations are being made by the Department to plan for the establishment of the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU)?

Mrs Long: It is clear from the earlier draft legislation published by the Northern Ireland Office that many of the areas to be included in that legislation do not fall within my responsibilities. However, the recent commitment included recognition that the legislation should have the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly, so work will have to be done to achieve that before we go any further. It is unclear whether that will be via a legislative consent motion. As the Member rightly indicates, it is a matter of some urgency. Accepting that, there are issues that we can address in preparation. A specialist team has been put in place to scope out the work needed for the HIU. Whilst we are working on this as a Department, unless the UK Government provide funding, as well as legislation, it will be incredibly difficult for us to be able to deliver a scheme that can deliver for victims of the Troubles.

Mr Frew: The Minister mentioned funding and the NIO. She will know that the vires regarding the decision on separated prisoners in our prison system rests with the Secretary of State. Does the Minister agree that the burden of paying for the separation of the Prison Service should be placed at the NIO, shadowy as it may be, allowing for that money to go into front-line services in the prisons?

3.00 pm

Mrs Long: We have gone some way from the HIU and the Stormont House Agreement to the separated regime in prisons, but, in principle, I am always happy for somebody else to pick up the bill for issues that we have to take care of in the Department. If the NIO is willing to do so, I am more than happy to let it. We recognise the sensitivity of the separated regime, but, realistically, at this time, we are working hard with our colleagues in the Prison Service to make sure that the regime is stable; that the numbers, insofar as they are within our gift, can be reduced; and that those in the unseparated regime are not following a significantly different regime from the rest of those in the prison system. That is hugely important.

Mr Stewart: Does the Minister concede that any investigation body investigating the past, such as the HIU, cannot be both investigator and adjudicator?

Mrs Long: Such a body needs to be article 2-compliant. It is important that the body that investigates then produces reports that are forwarded to a separate body to determine whether prosecutions should take place. I am not sure whether that is the particular issue that the Member hints at. From our perspective, that would be the separation that we see there being. It is entirely appropriate, however, that those who do the investigation produce the reports.

Ms Bunting: To go back to the original question, what liaison has the Minister or her Department had with the NIO on the responses to the most recent legacy consultation? In her view, what must happen as a result of the concerns raised by innocent victims?

Mrs Long: As the Member will be well aware, the issue has drawn some particular political controversy over many years, and I suspect that that may not change in the near future. However, it is a matter for the NIO, which took forward the consultation, to look at and assess the responses. From our perspective, we are clear that the current regime is not fit for purpose and cannot continue to deal with historical cases indefinitely.

We recognise that the implications of continuing to police and investigate the past out of current budgets is a deflection from the work of the present, yet it is important work that needs to be done, because, if not done, that will colour people's interactions with the justice system in the present. While there may be many concerns about the Stormont House Agreement and the HIU, there is, as it stands, no alternative proposal that has received any more support than that agreement. We have a duty to try to take the issue forward in a way that allows the police, the judiciary, the Police Ombudsman and all the others involved to move forward and focus on policing the present and the future and allow the past to be dealt with through a comprehensive mechanism. The Stormont House Agreement, while imperfect, is the best opportunity that we have to do that.

Mr McGrath: I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time and wish her well. Does she agree that the establishment of the HIU is the last chance for many victims and survivors to obtain truth and justice for their loved ones and that all those responsible for their deaths should be held to account, regardless of who they are?

Mrs Long: I do. It is hugely important, in order to transform our society from one in which there have been significant issues around lawlessness and lack of respect for the rule of law. In order to build confidence that we are going forward on a different basis, it is hugely important that we address those issues and give victims the opportunity to receive not just truth but, where possible, justice. We also have to be realistic. With the passage of time, there is an issue about how likely it is that cases will be fit to be prosecuted. There is also an ongoing issue of people who have died without having received justice and have carried that burden to their grave. We, as a society, have a duty to deal with those who are victims and who were most acutely affected by the Troubles, but that duty goes beyond those who were victims and survivors; in setting standards, it extends to wider society. We have to look at what happens in other places — for example, historical sex offences are being prosecuted, and it is right that that should be so. There is not a person in the Chamber who would argue that the age of the offender or the remoteness of the incident should excuse proper investigation and prosecution where possible. It should be no less serious when it comes to murder.

HIA Compensation Payments

3. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions her Department has had with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse (HIA) to ensure the roll-out of the compensation payments meets their needs. (AQO 126/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Executive Office has policy, statutory and budgetary responsibility for the establishment of the redress board and has been leading engagement with

victims and survivors' groups. However, my Department is working diligently to establish the redress board and to support Justice Colton to discharge his functions as president-elect of that board.

The president-elect has met the Interim Advocate appointed to act as the voice of victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse and to ensure that their needs are known and communicated, pending the appointment of a Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse, on a number of occasions to discuss the remit of the board. He also met representatives of each of the victims and survivors' groups on 18 December 2019 to discuss a number of issues, including the board's intended approach to the payment of compensation.

Redress board officials are in regular contact with the Interim Advocate's office, and a very helpful meeting with victims' groups to discuss the content of the application form took place on 21 January. A further three meetings based on agendas proposed by the Interim Advocate are scheduled to take place this month to help to inform the board's emerging procedures and guidance. The president-elect is content that any issues raised by the groups about the redress board's emerging procedures should be shared with redress board officials via the Interim Advocate's office. Redress board officials will continue to engage with the groups through the Interim Advocate to ensure that the redress scheme meets their needs.

Mr McGuigan: Like others have done, I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. I congratulate her on her new job and wish her well.

I thank the Minister for her full answer, in which she mentioned the application form. Will she clarify whether the groups will get sight of the application form before it is published?

Mrs Long: I mentioned that three further meetings would take place by the end of February. I am not clear as to whether the application form will be the subject of discussion at those meetings, but I will check and revert to the Member in writing to confirm that with him one way or the other.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the Minister to her new post. Following the letter from the head of the Civil Service, David Sterling, to six institutions in late 2019 that stated that institutions had an obligation to contribute to payments for victims, will she outline what discussions she has had with Executive colleagues regarding contributions from such institutions towards compensation for victims of HIA?

Mrs Long: As I said at the outset, the Executive Office has the policy, statutory and budgetary responsibility for the establishment of the redress board. That question would be best placed with the Executive Office and the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mrs Barton: Will the Minister confirm that there will be no delay in compensation payments and that the first payments will be made by the end of March?

Mrs Long: My understanding is that the payments will be done by the end of April. The board will be open to receive application forms by the end of March. Applicants will then be dealt with as swiftly as they can be, but that will depend, obviously, on the volume and complexity of the applications that are received.

In deciding the priority order of applications to be processed, the board will have due regard to the age and health of the applicant. It will be possible to submit application forms online or on paper. It is anticipated that the panel will sit to determine the first payments from 20 April and those first payments will be made in early May.

Mr Blair: Like previous Members, I take the opportunity to welcome the Minister, a colleague of mine, to her post, and I wish her well for the future.

Can I ask for clarification from the Minister whether those who have already given evidence to the Hart inquiry will also be required to give evidence again to the redress board?

Mrs Long: That will not be the case. Applicants who gave evidence to the Hart inquiry will not be required to provide further written evidence to the redress board unless they wish to do so. They will be asked if they are content for the redress board to determine their application on the basis of the evidence of the Hart inquiry, and the redress board will then obtain a copy of that from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland on the applicant's behalf.

Rape Prosecutions

5. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Justice how many reported cases of rape have resulted in prosecution since 2014. (AQO 128/17-22)

Mrs Long: I ask for the Speaker's indulgence. There are quite a lot of statistics in the answer, and I do not want to stumble over them. I may take slightly longer than I would like.

Figures from the Police Service of Northern Ireland record that there were 5,290 offences of rape, including attempted rape, reported to the police during the period from 2014 to 2019. Of those, a charge or summons has been the outcome in 385 cases. Please note that the number of offences resulting in charge or summons is only provisional: investigations for rape offences recorded since 2014 will be ongoing and may result in a charge or summons at a future date. Similarly, numbers of offences reported since April 2019 included in the total of 5,290 are provisional.

Figures from the Public Prosecution Service record that, for the period 2015-16 to 2018-19, there were 1,941 files received that included an offence of rape or attempted rape. During that period, a total of 258 prosecution or diversion decisions were issued by the Public Prosecution Service for cases that included an offence of rape or attempted rape.

For cases dealt with at courts, in the period 2014 to 2018, which included at least one count of a substantive or attempted rape offence, there were 345 prosecutions resulting in convictions in 81 cases.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. There is a lot of concern about the process and the figures out there, including the up-to-date figures that we have just received. What steps are being taken to increase the low conviction rate, and how will the Department support victims going through the process, as that does not appear to happen now?

Mrs Long: That is a key issue and, clearly, one that is hugely important. The Gillen review was commissioned by the Criminal Justice Board to examine how the criminal justice system dealt with cases of serious sexual assault. Sir John Gillen made 253 recommendations for improving

procedures and practice to deliver better outcomes and support for complainants. I am committed to delivering real change in the experience of complainants and welcome the commitment that has also been shown by justice partners to work with my Department to ensure coordinated reform.

Sir John's comprehensive review presents an opportunity to focus our efforts on delivering a justice system that complainants have confidence in. We want to prioritise the areas that can have the greatest impact on complainants going through that system in the first phase of implementation. Recommendations to be taken forward as a priority in the first phase include the appointment of additional case progression officers in the PPS and PSNI; establishing a new remote evidence centre in Belfast to allow vulnerable complainants to give evidence without having to appear in court; providing complainants with legal advice and representation pretrial to ensure they are better supported and have a voice from the outset; consideration of how best to take forward pilot pre-recorded cross-examination next year, where victims give their evidence ahead of trial; and reform of the committal process later this year so that complainants have to give oral evidence only once in court. Also, we intend to do scoping work on providing additional support to young victims and witnesses, including consideration of the child house model in a Northern Ireland context. A dedicated implementation team has been established in the Department of Justice to coordinate those phased actions as agreed by the Criminal Justice Board.

Mr Speaker: I call Linda Dillon for a very quick question and the Minister for a super-quick answer.

Ms Dillon: My question has been partly answered. I wish the Minister well in her post, and I am sure that I will work closely with her in my role as Deputy Chair.

You outlined that your Department was working towards addressing some of the Gillen recommendations.

Do you think that the gaps are more in the process or in the legislation? In other words, do we need further legislation or will the process be enough to deal with the outstanding issues?

3.15 pm

Mrs Long: I think that it covers three sets of areas. First of all, there is an educational piece, where the Department of Justice and other Departments need to engage in educating people better about the issues of consent and sexual assault. We also need to look at process issues that can be resolved without legislation. The third category does include legislation, and I hope that, in the miscellaneous provisions Bill that we are hoping to bring forward next year in the Department of Justice, we will be able to take through the first wave of legislative change from the Gillen review. The committal reform Bill, which I have said will be brought forward this spring, will deal with at least one of those issues, namely replication and expecting somebody to repeat their evidence more than once in court.

Mr Speaker: We now move to topical questions.

Provisional IRA: Current Status

T1. **Mr Buckley** asked the Minister of Justice, after welcoming her to her post, in the light of the fact that, last

week, the Chief Constable appeared before the Justice Committee and failed to give the police assessment of the current status of the Provisional IRA, whether she, as Minister with responsibility for policing matters, can give her assessment. (AQT 91/17-22)

Mrs Long: The assessment of the activity of the Provisional IRA is not a matter for the Department of Justice. The assessment of active terrorism is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office and an operational matter for the Chief Constable. Therefore, it is not something that I can offer.

Mr Buckley: Does the Minister recognise the damage to public confidence in our justice system that this lack of evidence results in, when a Chief Constable is ducking the question, a Justice Minister is dodging the question and an independent commission has run away from the question? In light of recent activities in the Republic of Ireland, the people of Northern Ireland are quite rightly and legitimately asking the question: where does this responsibility lie? We have the right to an answer. Or is it a case that dark forces continue to operate with no accountability from our judiciary?

Mrs Long: For fear of any confusion, I did not dodge the question. In fact, I gave the Member a very clear answer: responsibility for this matter lies with the Northern Ireland Office.

Springhill/Westrock Massacre

T2. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Justice whether she supports the campaign of the families of the Springhill and Westrock massacre, which took place in West Belfast in July 1972, and, in particular, whether she will support publicly the families' demand for an inquest into the death of their loved ones. (AQT 92/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. As you are aware, there is already a procedure in place when issues are referred to the coroner for an inquest decision. However, I believe that the best way forward in dealing with legacy issues is, as I stated in the earlier part of my answers, a comprehensive process such as that set out in the Stormont House Agreement, but I am happy to meet the Member and his constituents, if it would be helpful, to discuss it further with them.

Mr Carroll: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. I cannot speak on behalf of all the families, but I would imagine that they would be willing to meet you. I thank you for that offer. Five people were massacred — shot down in cold blood — three of whom were teenagers. It is an absolute crime, and those families deserve truth and justice. I will certainly pass that message on to the families.

Magilligan Prison: Accommodation

T3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Justice, given that homelessness is a topical issue at the moment, albeit that she might wonder why on earth she is being asked a question on that subject, and in the light of the fact that she may not yet have visited Magilligan prison, to state whether, if she has visited, she discovered that hundreds of prisoners are living in accommodation that is over 80 years old, including Nissen huts that were built during the Second World War, and to outline her plans to address that issue. (AQT 93/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. The Department is committed to replacing the prison at Magilligan and retaining a prison at that site. We recognise that significant investment is required on the site and, as part of the work of the Prison Service and the directorate for prisons, they are taking forward a number of proposals that are required on the prisons estate. I would be happy to inform the Member of the detail of what is proposed. We are aware of Magilligan. I have not visited yet, but I will visit in the next few weeks.

Mr Dallat: When the Minister is visiting, perhaps she will slip me in to the Škoda limousine; I would be happy to join her. [Laughter.]

Mr Speaker: As long as you get a release date, John. Just ensure that you get that.

Mr Dallat: I join the Minister in supporting the retention of Magilligan prison where it is. Not only does it provide employment to a lot of people, but the local community has embraced it, particularly the open part of the prison. I can speak in glowing terms about it, which is why I have raised the question. Will the Minister give us a timescale for when the 80-year-old Nissen huts will disappear?

Mrs Long: It would not be appropriate for me to prejudge the outcome of the development of the estates, but, as you know, in December 2018, the Northern Ireland Prison Service published a document on the estates and sought the view of stakeholders. We remain committed to the redevelopment of Magilligan prison. An outline business case is at an advanced stage for that and will be submitted for approval in the coming months. I assure him that we are not dragging our heels on the issue.

Interface Barriers

T4. **Ms Mullan** asked the Minister of Justice, after wishing her well in her new role, for an update on the commitment in the 2013 T:BUC strategy to create a 10-year programme to reduce and remove by 2023 all interface barriers. (AQT 94/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department has been taking forward work, on a collaborative basis with other Departments, on trying to support communities in the removal of interface barriers. Some of those communities, as you will appreciate, face significant challenges in building the confidence that would allow them to feel safe and secure. That has to be our priority; that people feel safe in those communities when barriers are removed.

There are a number of areas where successful programmes have been introduced, and I think that three more are due for consideration this spring. Our responsibility in the Department of Justice is to move at the pace that is demanded by the residents in the neighbourhood. We cannot move ahead of them, because, without their support, it will not be successful; it actually could be counterproductive. Equally, we should not be behind them when they ask for our support and for change to be made. My role is to support them fully in what they need to do. I know that our officials engage with people in interface communities to look at how those structures can be reduced, amended and, eventually, removed. I think that we would all like a community that is free from barriers, physical and mental, in how people can live their

lives in a way that does not curb their aspirations and freedom to make their own choices.

Ms Mullan: I thank the Minister for her answer and her understanding of the issues. The creation of an interface barriers support package was identified as a key action. An aftercare support package was presented to the interface programme board in June 2019. As of February 2020, it appears that that has still not been signed off, and no delivery schedule is yet available. Will the Minister comment on why that package is still not available to local communities that are impacted? When is it likely to be in place?

Mrs Long: I cannot give a definitive answer, but I guess that part of the reason why it has not been signed off is that we have not had a Minister in place to do that. I will certainly talk to the Department to see what stage that is at and whether there is anything more that we can do to advance it. It is crucial that we not only support communities as they prepare to remove barriers but make sure that adequate support is in place afterwards. Even low-level antisocial behaviour in an area where there previously was an interface structure can cause real fear in a community; they could think that things will escalate and become much more serious. It is important that we have early-warning systems in place and good support through neighbourhood policing, community contact and a package of measures to make sure that people feel that they are safer without the structure there than with it in place. That is, ultimately, our objective.

Upskirting: Criminal Offence

T5. **Ms Ennis** asked the Minister of Justice how soon she intends to introduce legislation to create a new criminal offence of upskirting, the introduction of which formed part of the Sinn Féin response to her Department's consultation last year on measures to combat child sexual exploitation. (AQT 95/17-22)

Mrs Long: As the Member will be aware, a number of things are in process in respect of sexual offences, not least the Gillen review. There is also an issue with cybercrime and looking at how those attacks are done; there is a White Paper in Westminster on that. We will consider which is the most appropriate vehicle for us to be able to deal with that so that we ensure that people are protected.

There is no doubt that upskirting, revenge porn and a whole series of other online abuses are serious matters. They are a serious invasion of privacy and a serious violation of people's bodily autonomy. We need to deal with those issues, even through a piece of education work, such as that suggested in the Gillen review. It is important that people understand the seriousness of those incidents. As digital crime remains a reserved matter, we might need to look carefully at whether the Assembly is able to progress that or whether it is better that we ask Westminster to do so on our behalf.

Ms Ennis: Sinn Féin also recommended reversing the burden of proof from child victims to the defendants for some sexual offences. Does the Minister intend to legislate for that change?

Mrs Long: I have no plans to legislate for the change. However, we are doing a number of things to support child victims, including making sure that they are able to give

evidence remotely in cases so that they are not at risk of coming into contact with the offender; and ensuring that they are properly supported in advance of that in an age-appropriate way. There are a number of other things that we can do to ensure that victims are properly cared for. A number of packages and measures are in place to support victims, but there are no plans for legislation. However, I mentioned in an earlier answer the Department's intention to table a miscellaneous provisions Bill in the latter half of this mandate. Those Bills can be burdensome for the Committee — I apologise in advance — because they tend to cover a wide range of issues, but there is the opportunity, if the Member wants to discuss her concerns further with me, that it could be scoped and taken forward at that time.

Paul Quinn

T6. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice, given that she may be aware that the parents of Paul Quinn were in Parliament Buildings today to express their disgust that the Finance Minister, Conor Murphy, has failed to withdraw his unjust claim of criminality against their son, whether she agrees with and supports their call for him to withdraw his claim. (AQT 96/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. Each Minister takes a Pledge of Office that commits us:

“to work collectively with the other members of the Executive Committee to achieve a society free of paramilitarism; to challenge all paramilitary activity and associated criminality”.

All of us need to live up to those commitments. Anyone with information about Paul Quinn's murder should pass it to the police. Any attack by any group on any member of our community is completely unacceptable and is to be condemned. I have huge sympathy for the Quinn family. Breege and Stephen Quinn have acted with integrity throughout this process, not only in trying to seek justice for their son but in trying to ensure that the smear against his name is removed. It is right that it should be and that the insult that was added to the injury of his loss should be withdrawn. An apology cannot make up for the damage that has been done, but it would go a long way to showing an understanding of the impact that that has had.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister agree that the Finance Minister's failure to withdraw the unproven claim of criminality undermines the credibility and integrity of an Executive that place a huge emphasis on collective responsibility?

Mrs Long: I cannot answer for the Finance Minister, but I was in my place when the deputy First Minister was answering that question and said that the allegation had been withdrawn. So, I point the Member to that answer: the allegation has been withdrawn; it is not, as he suggests, that there has been a refusal to do so.

Mr Speaker: We have a minute and a half left.

Mr Blair: I assure you that I will try to stick to that.

Stalking Legislation

T7. **Mr Blair** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her plans to introduce legislation to outlaw stalking, in the light

of the fact that his constituent Fiona Jamieson has been in the news recently regarding stalking and the pressing need for legislation. (AQT 97/17-22)

3.30 pm

Mrs Long: Thank you. I met Fiona Jamieson and her daughter Ciara Hindman, who has been a victim of stalking. Her mother has been an incredible advocate for her. I have met a number of victims of stalking over the past number of weeks, and Members will be aware that it is my intention to introduce a Bill in the autumn to create a specific offence of stalking. It is also the intention of that Bill to create stalking protection orders, as we are aware that the burden under harassment legislation etc requires the victim to go to court to get a non-molestation order. That can often be appealed and allows those who maliciously wish to use the justice system to continue unwanted contact with their victim to do so. Stalking protection orders would be issued by the police, thereby relieving victims of stalking of both a financial burden and the burden of going to court in order to obtain one.

Mr Speaker: Members, time is up. I ask Members to take their ease for a moment or two, please.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Stalford] in the Chair)

Communities

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question number 8 has been withdrawn.

Reval2020: Sports Clubs

1. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the impact on the viability of sports clubs of Reval2020. (AQO 150/17-22)

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities): I thank the Member for his question. I am aware of concerns raised by representatives from a number of sports governing bodies about the impact of the latest rates revaluation for sports clubs. The assessment of rateable valuation is, in the first instance, a matter for my Executive partner the Minister of Finance. I am pleased to note that Land and Property Services (LPS) will apply the sport and recreation rate relief and the community amateur sports club rate relief for qualifying sports clubs. Those arrangements have not been affected by the revaluation, Reval2020.

The measures were put in place to allow significantly reduced rates liability across the sports sector. In October 2016, the Assembly passed the necessary legislation to allow for enhanced rate relief for community amateur sports clubs. That allowed enhanced rate relief from 80% to 100% for community amateur sports clubs that do not operate social-club bar facilities. In addition, sports clubs that are neither community amateur sports clubs nor registered charities are still benefiting from an 80% reduction in rates on the parts of their facility that are used solely for sport and recreational purposes. I encourage the governing bodies and clubs that are concerned about the effect of the revaluation exercise and that operate facilities that do not qualify for rate relief to address their concerns through the appropriate channel in Land and Property Services.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that some of the percentage increases in NAV are in the region of 30%, and in some cases over 40%, including double digits for Casement Park, which is not, as the Minister will know, currently operational as a sports ground, how does she square that with the Programme for Government's objective of increasing the well-being of all and the specific outcome of promoting longer, healthier and more active lives? Surely this is entirely the wrong direction of travel.

Ms Hargey: Sport plays a key role in our society, through engagement and through health outcomes for all age groups. Sport also brings various groups together to enjoy it. On the impact of the revaluation, any governing bodies or, indeed, any clubs should follow the process that is set out. Therefore, if clubs have concerns with the increase, they should be speaking to Land and Property Services and to their governing body. I have not yet received any correspondence from governing bodies and clubs. I am open to speaking to them about the impact, but there is a process there if they do not fall within the rate rebate system. Where they have a financial income through other means, they need to look at that to ensure that it is as fit for purpose as it can be.

Mr Hilditch: This goes beyond the current relief that is available. Will the Minister make representations to her Executive colleagues about sports clubs that will be absolutely hammered by Reval2020, when, in reality, their clubhouses have limited opening hours and are operational purely to raise money to sustain the clubs and the sport? Reval2020 could sound the death knell for many clubs and sporting organisations.

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, I have not yet had any approach from governing bodies or clubs. I am open to listening to any that want to come forward. Obviously, in the first instance, looking at the revaluation sits within the Department of Finance, but I encourage any governing body or club to engage urgently with Land and Property Services, because there is a dedicated process there, to look at what the valuations have brought up. I encourage any club or body to go to LPS.

Ms Ennis: The Minister has answered my supplementary question in a previous answer.

Mr O'Toole: On the subject of the financial viability of sports clubs, will the Minister consider meeting groups that campaign or advocate for an all-Ireland soccer league to find out from them what their proposals are to improve the viability of football on both sides of the border on an all-island basis, given that they have also made clear that they respect the integrity of two different national teams?

Ms Hargey: There is a request for a meeting in the system. We are working through the processes to ensure that a meeting happens in the near future. Once that takes place, I will update Members.

Mr Buckley: With regard to the viability of sporting clubs, and following on from the ongoing governance and accounting concerns that relate to Sport NI, has the Minister had an opportunity to read the lessons learned report from June 2019? If so, is she satisfied with its conclusions?

Ms Hargey: I am going through the issues surrounding Sport NI. I am looking at the valuations and next steps. I

will engage with Sport NI directly. I will update Members in due course.

Social Inclusion and Social Change Strategies

2. **Mr Blair** asked the Minister for Communities what co-production and co-design she plans to undertake on the outstanding social inclusion and social change strategies. (AQO 151/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his question. My Department is the lead on producing a number of strategies that could support the Programme for Government as outlined in New Decade, New Approach. Those include the anti-poverty and child poverty strategy, a disability strategy, a gender strategy and a sexual orientation strategy. The principles and practice of people and community engagement, co-design and co-production will be a key part of the development and delivery of each of those strategies. The approach that is taken will be tailored to each individual strategy, depending on delivery timescales and work that has been completed to date. I am keen to involve people who will be most affected by the strategies at all stages of their development and will ensure that steps are taken to allow them to make a meaningful contribution to that work. I am committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable people in society have their voices heard and their views taken into account.

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for that reply and her replies so far and in this, my first exchange with her at Question Time, I wish her well and welcome her to her post.

Given the long list of outstanding strategies for social inclusion and change — a list that, perhaps one could argue, has been renewed by the New Decade, New Approach agreement — will the Minister assure the House that the Department will seek to involve a wide range of stakeholders from the outset of any consultation, and that stakeholders will not simply wait until, some way down the process, questions have already been set by departmental officials?

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. It is an important area. If we are to take a co-design approach, that has to be built in from the very start. It cannot be just attached to the end. As I said in my opening remarks, we have to ensure that our policies and strategies impact on those who need them the most: service users and those who will feel the impact. They have to be an integral part of the co-design process. That will be built in from the very start.

Ms Sheerin: Campaign groups have been promised a disability forum for a number of years now. When will that be implemented? Can the Minister advise if that forum will be the vehicle for the co-design of a new disability strategy?

Ms Hargey: I am obviously considering the establishment of a disability stakeholder forum as part of the development of the new disability strategy. The role and remit of that forum will need to be considered in the context of the Programme for Government and enhanced arrangements for cross-departmental collaboration. Once I have considered it in the coming weeks, I will outline plans to Members in the time ahead and will say what the composition of the forum will be.

Ms S Bradley: I welcome the Minister's comments about reaching out to vulnerable groups. Can she give an assurance that those hard-to-reach minority groups will be included, particularly those that will be directly affected by any strategies?

Ms Hargey: Thanks very much for the question. It is essential we reach out to all groups, particularly those that are furthest removed. A co-design process works with those who have a lived experience of the topic at hand, and we will look at professional expertise to try to bring both together. We want to democratise those policies and strategies as much as possible, so I will be looking at who can be involved and at how we can use, for example, the community and voluntary sector to reach out to those hard-to-reach communities and individuals. As we start to move through each of the strategies, co-design around the policy development and methodology will be key, and I will outline how we are going to approach that as I move forward.

Mr Muir: First, I welcome the Minister to her post. I have enjoyed working with the Minister over the last number of years, and I look forward to working with her in her new position as Minister for Communities.

Part of her ministerial responsibility includes policy responsibility for sexual orientation. What does the Minister plan to do to discharge that to improve the life of LGBT citizens in Northern Ireland who, frankly, have not been very well-served previously by the Assembly? This is an opportunity for the Minister to take forward action on that. What practical actions is the Minister planning to take to improve the life of LGBT citizens in Northern Ireland?

Ms Hargey: Thanks very much for your question. All these strategies are in ways interdependent, and, in New Decade, New Approach, there is a commitment for me to publish, within three months of the institutions being up and running, a comprehensive timetable for the development and delivery of each of these strategies, and that is something I will keep to.

In looking at our LGBT-plus community in the sexual orientation strategy, the first thing is to ensure that I engage with and listen to the community from the outset. Indeed, I am in the middle of arranging meetings to start those initial engagements. There is the draft of a sexual orientation strategy sitting there. We need to make sure that it is fit for purpose for now because things have moved on. The big issue is to make sure that all those strategies support and give visibility and respect to the community. Importantly, we should embed international human rights into our own domestic situation. We should uphold it and have a co-design approach that the community itself is involved in, particularly the hard-to-reach voices that may not be heard at the moment. There is a commitment to do that. We will also, of course, listen to Members who work with communities already to ensure that the strategy and the policy are fit for purpose.

Event Scheme Model: Armagh and Newry

3. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Communities whether she will consider replicating the Belfast city centre event scheme model in Armagh and Newry. (AQO 152/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Thanks very much for your question. Whilst I have no plans at the moment to introduce a specific

event scheme in those cities, my Department's regional development office works closely with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to develop and deliver regeneration projects in Armagh and Newry respectively.

The regional development office provides capital grant funding to those councils for a number of initiatives, such as public realm and revitalisation schemes, and they often include funding for event infrastructure or equipment. For example, previous public realm schemes have created event spaces and bespoke lighting, and revitalisation projects have funded the purchase of mobile stage equipment and public address systems for use at council events.

My Department has also provided funding to councils for the promotion and marketing of their town centres and city centres. That support often goes towards the promotion and funding of specific events such as Christmas markets and community events that animate the physical spaces created. I am content that the mechanisms that already exist between my Department and the two councils are sufficient to allow any grant funding of events, and I have no plans to replicate the Belfast scheme in Newry and Armagh.

3.45 pm

Mr Irwin: I am sure that the Minister will accept that Belfast city is in a similar position. The amount of money for events is, I am told, £200,000. Does she agree that a much smaller amount of money for the two cities that I mentioned — Newry and Armagh — would make a big difference to both?

Ms Hargey: The resources that have gone to the areas of Newry and Armagh since April 2011 are £6.5 million in capital investment and £493,000 in revenue. As was stated, a large part of that is for events and funding. I am willing to engage with the councils in the time ahead to look at what else the Department can do. A large scope of that money goes towards events that those councils are coming forward with, but I am more than willing to discuss that further.

Mr McNulty: I welcome the Minister to her post and wish her well in her role. My constituency of Newry and Armagh is rich in culture. We have our rhymers, our bullets, our dramatists, our musicians and our poets. An curadhmír springs to mind. The Cailleach Bhéara sent shudders of fear through me as a child. I welcome the Minister's capital investment in the new cultúrlann at Aonach Mhacha in Armagh city, which, I am excited to say, is due to open next month. Will the Minister take the opportunity to wish the group well? Will she bring forward a support scheme to help to develop and celebrate cultural heritage in places such as the new cultúrlann Aonach Mhacha in Armagh?

Ms Hargey: I hope to attend the opening event in March and to visit the project to see at first hand the excellent work that is being done. Obviously, it adds to the cultural tapestry and vibrancy of our places and our communities. I will consider all of this in the time ahead to see what further programmes can be provided to support that type of work. I will outline that in the time ahead, once that is considered.

Mr Buckley: In light of all politics being local, will the Minister comment on and, perhaps, look at possible funding opportunities and streams for the biggest one-day festival in Northern Ireland: the sham fight in Scarva on 13 July?

Ms Hargey: I am not aware of any request that has come in about that. I would have to look at it in terms of events. Obviously, working closely with local government will be key to making sure that we maximise funding and assessing the community impact that events have and how they attract visitors to a certain place. I am more than willing to speak with any council and any Member in the time ahead to look at events that will transform our spaces and attract visitors, both locally and internationally.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I always worry at the sham fight, because you never know who is going to win.

Housing Executive: Debt

Ms Armstrong: I will not talk about the Portaferry Gala but instead go to question 4.

4. **Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Communities what discussions she has had with the Minister of Finance on the Housing Executive's debt. (AQO 153/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am committed to delivering on the pledge made in 'New Decade, New Approach' that the Executive will examine options to remove the historical debt from the Housing Executive. I have already met Minister Murphy to discuss the matter and to explore what may be done in relation to the Housing Executive's landlord legacy debt.

As Members may already be aware, the historical debt results from loans that were generally taken out to finance new-build housing activities by the Housing Executive and its predecessor organisations, including the Housing Trust and former local authorities. The level of historical debt, including capital and interest outstanding, at 31 December 2019 was £332 million. That is due for repayment to the Department of Finance and councils by 2036-37. There is a significance to the Housing Executive debt because of the massive investment challenge it faces if it is to provide a sustainable and long-term future for its portfolio of social homes. Action on the Housing Executive may play a part in addressing that, albeit a minor part alongside many more substantial actions. Revitalisation of the Housing Executive is key, and I will engage on that in the time ahead.

Ms Armstrong: Minister, I appreciate that this is a big issue for your Department and especially for the Housing Executive. Will you provide any of the actions that you have considered to date on how to future-proof the Housing Executive? Perhaps you could provide them in writing. What plans do you have to make sure that the Housing Executive is stable, out of debt and fit for purpose to deliver the much-needed housing across Northern Ireland?

Ms Hargey: I am looking at considering the revitalisation of the Housing Executive. Obviously, we will need to look at a number of levers over the next 10 years. Once I finalise my view of the future direction of this, I will inform the Chamber and the Committee.

Ms Ni Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her response, particularly to Kellie Armstrong's question. My question is similar. The 'New Decade, New Approach' document has within it the potential for removing historical debt from the Housing Executive. Will the Minister ensure that any proposals to increase rents are matched against affordability? How will the commitments around the revitalisation and the removal of historical debt be delivered within this Assembly?

Ms Hargey: Obviously, affordability is key, because we do not want to increase the burden on the renter or, indeed, the public purse. We will look at the revitalisation of the Housing Executive in the whole. We will look at investment opportunities with existing stock and then look at the wider housing stock more extensively. I have raised the issue, along with corporation tax, with the Minister of Finance. While those will provide some solutions, a complete look at the revitalisation of the Housing Executive will be needed over the next 10 years. We will have to look at the debt, the income that is generated and, importantly, how we maintain existing stock whilst looking at an ambitious housing programme in the time ahead. The renter — the person in each of the homes — needs to be protected in all cases.

Mr Newton: I note that the Minister has used the word “revitalisation” several times in her answers to the question. Will the Minister consider revitalisation to include the potential of the Housing Executive to build new homes? Where there is demolition of Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes, will the Minister consider that those sites will stay within and become an asset of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive?

Ms Hargey: I will look at all housebuilding options. At the moment, we build 1,750 new builds per annum, the majority of which are in housing associations. When you look at the increased housing need, you see that that is not enough to meet the need, particularly of those in critical need. I will look at this overarchingly in the time ahead. Dealing with the debt issues and the issues around corporation tax is one element of what needs to happen in the Housing Executive. We also need to look at the rents in a more holistic way and at other solutions and means of financing. There is financial transactions capital and the ONS legislation that needs to come forward. I will look at all those options in the time ahead, as I lay out my vision and my future approach to where housing will go. I will do that in the coming weeks and months.

Housing Executive: Northern Region

5. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Communities what progress has been made by the Housing Executive to streamline the adaptations and disabled grants processes in its northern region. (AQO 154/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In the latter part of 2019, the Housing Executive streamlined the adaptations process in the north region, mirroring the strategy that was so successfully piloted in the south region. That process continues to be reviewed, and I am happy to provide the Member with more information once the data is available.

The Housing Executive has completed a review of the disabled facilities grant process, and a number of improvements have been implemented to streamline the process and improve the customer journey. They include carrying out the test-of-resources process at the start; implementing a data-sharing agreement with the Department for Communities to provide verification of benefits more quickly; and enabling technical officers to manage a case from start to finish without additional handovers. The Housing Executive is also considering the role of grant case officers, to enable them to be responsible for grant cases from start to finish. That aspect has not yet been implemented, as the Housing Executive

considers the level of authority associated with the case officer grade. In addition, the Housing Executive has specified, developed and implemented a new bespoke, more flexible IT system to support the grant process. Those improvements have been implemented across all Housing Executive grant locations.

Mr Robinson: Will the Minister meet me to discuss outstanding Housing Executive issues in my constituency?

Ms Hargey: Yes, there is no problem. I can do that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Happy days.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister’s responses so far. The average age of people in the northern region is very high. I am not sure whether the Minister knows how many passed away before adaptations were completed or shortly afterwards. Is the Minister prepared to look at ways in which the whole process could be fast-tracked not just through the assessment but particularly through the planners, who demand a list of requirements from people who are suffering life-changing experiences and cannot wait?

Ms Hargey: With all of the schemes, we want to get help to those who need it most in the quickest time possible. The review is ongoing, and I will ask the Housing Executive to consider fast-tracking as part of it. If the Member wants to speak to my officials about what else could be done, I am more than willing to arrange that. I will raise this directly with them afterwards.

Subregional Stadia Programme for Soccer

6. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the subregional stadia programme for soccer. (AQO 155/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to developing the subregional stadia programme that was included in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. It is a priority for my Department and, indeed, for the Executive. The programme will transform soccer at all levels by addressing the current and future needs of the game. It provides a real opportunity to contribute to the delivery of wider government priorities and to address a range of social, economic and cultural issues.

The programme itself must be open and transparent. It is critical that any improvements to existing stadia or new developments prioritise health and safety provisions, accessibility and inclusion, as well as being sustainable and based on realistic needs. A 12-week consultation on the programme proposals based on the ‘Irish Football Association (IFA) Facilities Strategy’, dated 2011 took place from 30 November 2015 to 22 February 2016. However, in the absence of Ministers, no decisions were made on the programme proposals or on the financial allocations in the programme.

Given that the IFA strategy and the consultation it was based on are now nine years old, things have changed in the interim. It is only right that I take time to review the programme. I have asked my officials to engage urgently with key stakeholders to help them to inform the development of detailed plans for delivering a successful subregional programme. Once the engagement has been completed, I will consider proposals on how best to take forward the programme as urgently as possible.

4.00 pm

Mr Lyttle: The Minister will appreciate the extent of the frustration at the extreme delay in the allocation of funding. When will the review be completed, and what budget will be allocated for football stadia funding?

Ms Hargey: The previous commitment was for £36.2 million. Things have changed a lot over the past nine years, and I would not have been content to allocate money without having an assessment of up-to-date needs. I thought it important to engage stakeholders on the ground to get an update on where things are at and where facilities sit, particularly because rule changes have happened in the past year that have had a knock-on effect on soccer programmes. My officials are undertaking the review as urgently as possible. Although they are engaged with that, they are also looking at detailed implementation plans and at developing a process for criteria for applications. That will come back to me within the next three months to look at. If I can quicken that up in any way, I will do so.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: There are literally about 30 seconds left, so I will call Karen Mullan and ask her and the Minister to keep it snappy. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Mullan: My question has been partly answered. I just want a timeline for the opening of applications.

Ms Hargey: I cannot give a specific timeline until the engagement takes place. Once that is done, I will develop a process for criteria for applications, which will include definite timelines.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The time for listed questions has passed, and we now move to topical questions.

Hillview, North Belfast: Housing Development

T1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Communities, after welcoming her to her post, for an assurance that, should the opportunity arise, the site at Hillview in north Belfast will be brought back into consideration for housing development, given that she will be aware from her time on Belfast City Council of the planning decision that was taken three years ago, which appeared to fly in the face of logic, particularly because of the failure of retail on that site in the past and its long period of vacancy and inactivity. (AQT 101/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I will be looking at all of that. It is a critical aim for me and the Department to increase the availability of social housing over the coming years. It is also part of New Decade, New Approach that we have a more ambitious housing programme to meet increasing need.

As the Member will be aware, Belfast City Council is conducting a strategic site assessment to look at land in the city of Belfast. I know that other councils are looking at land in their area as well. I have asked my officials to engage with Belfast City Council to look at what the land availability will be. There is chronic housing stress in areas such as north Belfast. Land availability then becomes a critical issue, so I want to do all that I can and use any instrument available in my Department to prioritise housing, but particularly to do it on the basis of need. Where the housing need is, that is where the new builds should be focused and developed. As I said, I will

be looking at all of that in the time ahead. I will update the Member as we move through the process.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Gary Middleton.

Mr Middleton: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I beg your pardon. Mr Lunn took so long to ask his question that we have run out of time. *[Laughter.]* I am only joking. I call Mr Lunn for a supplementary question, and then Mr Middleton.

Mr Lunn: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for her detailed answer. She mentioned at the end that decisions about housing in north Belfast in particular would be based on need. May I put it to her bluntly that need should not involve political considerations and that the absolute necessity in north Belfast, of all places, is to provide social housing, and a quantity of it, as soon as possible?

Ms Hargey: I am well aware of the issues pertaining to north Belfast. I cannot speak for any previous decisions that were taken by my Department, but, for me, decisions should be based on objective need, where people apply when they are in housing stress and that application is then assessed independently by the Housing Executive. I will be looking at the housing programme to match where the need is greatest. That is something that I want to commit to in the time ahead.

Pay Parity: Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

T2. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Communities what she is doing to address the issue of pay parity, given that, on Friday, he had the opportunity to meet with many community workers from Foyle, with pay parity being one of the key themes of the meetings, with some of the workers expressing concerns about the neighbourhood renewal areas in particular. (AQT 102/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his question. As somebody who once was a neighbourhood renewal worker, I am well aware of the issues. I live in a neighbourhood renewal community in south Belfast, and I met officials only last week about the neighbourhood renewal programme. I will write to neighbourhood renewal partnerships within the next week, setting out my plans for the next two years. Part of that will look at a review of the neighbourhood renewal programme, sitting below the anti-poverty strategy and co-designed with neighbourhood renewal partnerships and others, and will be key to those strategies going forward because they are best placed to know the issues.

Pay parity is a key issue. There has not been an increase in salaries in the last 10 years, so I have instructed a review to look at all community and voluntary sector work and where that impacts on workers and employment rights. If I can move as urgently as possible to look at neighbourhood renewal, I will, but I have to wait for this review to take place.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for her very detailed response. Another issue has been raised, again around pay, but it is in relation to yearly budgets as a whole. We know that many community workers are under pressure because the funding for their salary runs out, and the organisation does not have a budget in place. Are you

doing anything to look at possibly extending that to a three-year budget?

Ms Hargey: That is being considered in the Programme for Government. It will eventually look at multi-annual funding and budgeting, so this will be considered in line with that. As we develop a new anti-poverty strategy, we will look at where neighbourhood renewal sits within that programme. I will also outline some of my intention in the interim to those groups when I write to them this week.

Gender Discrimination

T3. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Communities, after stating that the Minister will be aware of previous United Nations reports on discrimination in housing, particularly in areas of Belfast and Derry, and further stating that her question is not about housing because Trevor Lunn's question was about housing, whether she has any plans to take forward the recommendations from the UN Committee on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. (AQT 103/17-22)

Ms Hargey: When I came into post a couple of weeks ago, CEDAW was holding a conference here looking at that very issue, and I took the opportunity to speak to those stakeholders who were in the room. As we take forward a gender strategy, that will be central, and it will be important for me and for the Executive to ensure that we demonstrate how we are meeting international obligations and, importantly, where we are embedding a human rights-based approach to all that we do, which includes gender equality at the heart of it.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her response. Central to all that will be closing the gender pay gap, particularly in relation to section 19 of the Employment Act 2016. I assume that that will be an integral part of the work that needs to be brought forward on this issue.

Ms Hargey: The implementation of section 19 rests with the Executive Office, but I am working with my Executive partners and officials are engaging with departmental officials to ensure that we can take that forward as soon as possible.

Housing Executive: Damp Properties

T4. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the Housing Executive addresses the damp in many of its properties. (AQT 104/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has an ongoing programme of maintenance. Bigger challenges lie ahead with keeping the existing stock fit for purpose, and that is part of the wider revitalisation work that we need to look at. A huge investment is needed in the existing Housing Executive stock over the next 10 years. This will be an urgent priority not just for me but for the Executive and the Assembly as a whole. Looking at issues of damp is key to that. If there are any specific issues or concerns that you have in your constituency, you can follow up and we can get the specifics answered for you.

Mr Easton: As the Minister probably knows, the Housing Executive is very good at using condensation as a cover-up for damp and for the lack of cavity wall insulation. Can the Minister ensure that she pushes the Housing Executive to actually address those issues?

Ms Hargey: Yes, I have a meeting shortly with the Housing Executive as an arm's-length body and as a key body in looking at that, and this issue will be raised. When you look particularly at the rounded nature of fuel poverty and poverty more generally, you see that living conditions are a key and fundamental part of that, so that will be raised. Again, if you have any specifics or background, you can share those with me, and I will be more than willing to raise them directly.

Sports Clubs: Rates

T5. **Ms Ennis** asked the Minister for Communities, after noting the exchange of views she had with other Members at the start of Question Time, whether she agrees that sport and physical recreation make a major contribution to the health of the population and that increasing rates for sports clubs could have a negative impact. (AQT 105/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Yes. I visited a number of sports clubs. I was in Ballymacash on Friday. I was in east Belfast a few weeks ago looking at how sport is being used to tackle and deal with homelessness and to engage with those communities that are falling on hard times. Sport plays a vital role. It reaches out to hard-to-reach groups, engages people, builds capacity and is a good contributor to what we try to do to address poverty, inequality and a range of other issues.

I covered rates. That primarily sits in the Department of Finance, and, if specific clubs or organisations have concerns, they should be addressing them through the process. That said, the rate rebate still works for amateur clubs and those that are registered charities; they can get up to 80% and, sometimes, 100% rate relief.

Ms Ennis: I agree with what you said. I know that the first port of call for any club that has issues is LPS, but I want to take into consideration what the Minister's Department could do. Will the Minister outline what important information her Department could provide to clubs about their organisational structure and governance to help them to have a better understanding of the opportunities out there for rate relief?

Ms Hargey: Yes, I am more than happy to do that. Whilst no organisation, governing body or club has contacted my Department yet, that may be in part because they have not received the bill for what the revaluation does. I am more than willing to speak to any organisation or club, but I will also instruct my officials to liaise with sports clubs or go through the bodies and Sport NI to give an update on preparing clubs for the valuation or, if they wish to make an appeal, to set out what the process is.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Harry Harvey.

Mr Harvey: Ah.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: You are on my list.

Mr Harvey: Sorry, no, I have no question.

Objective Need Criteria

T7. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Communities what she is doing to ensure that social inclusion and social clause strategies will be implemented based on objective need criteria. (AQT 107/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Objective need is in New Decade, New Approach as a way of working, and, in all the strategies that I will be taking forward — they were discussed earlier — objective need will be at the core. Co-design and co-production with those groups that are mostly impacted will also be at the heart of that, and I will outline plans on how we will knit objective need into them and what the approach will be.

Mr Boylan: To follow on, in the absence of an anti-poverty strategy, how does the Minister intend to tackle poverty in the interim period?

Ms Hargey: My Department tackles poverty in a range of ways, not least through recent moves around extending the existing welfare mitigations. One of those areas was the bedroom tax, and that has been extended indefinitely so that there is no cut-off date to the mitigation.

I have also closed the loophole for those who have a change of circumstances regarding the issue of the bedroom tax. I am also bringing forward regulations to extend the other existing mitigations. In the coming weeks, I will outline my approach to the wider social security issue and how it impacts on people the most. I will set out a way forward for how we engage with those on the ground who are impacted by this and how we work with support organisations, such as the Cliff Edge Coalition, the Human Rights Commission and, obviously, Professor Eileen Evason and Kevin Higgins, who were involved in the first round of mitigations. We have an extensive neighbourhood renewal programme and an area-of-risk programme that we will review. Those target the top 10% most deprived communities.

Other programmes include the affordable warmth scheme, which looks at fuel poverty. There is also the issue of social supermarkets. I am also looking at trying to develop a cooperative development hub in the time ahead to look at cooperative development and the idea of community wealth-building. We will also start, as soon as possible, to take forward the anti-poverty strategy and do some stakeholder engagements in the coming weeks and months to make sure that we speed up the introduction and implementation of that policy.

4.15 pm

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn, and questions 1 and 7 and questions 2 and 13 have been grouped for answer by the Minister.

Livestock Farmers: Coupled Payments

1. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he is giving consideration to coupled payments for livestock farmers, particularly in relation to young cattle destined for beef production. (AQO 136/17-22)

7. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans he has to bring forward a replacement to the common agricultural policy. (AQO 142/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 7 together.

I am looking at what future payments can do to support sustainable farming in our agricultural landscape. In doing that, I will give consideration not just to coupled payments but to all types of support that could be available. In relation to coupled payments, we have to take into account the provisions of the Northern Ireland protocol of the withdrawal agreement, which will put a limit on the amount of support that can be linked to production in Northern Ireland. Those limits are still to be determined, but they are likely to be similar to the limits under the common agricultural policy, which currently range from 8% to 15% of the total allocation for a member state. There will be ongoing consultation with farmers and other stakeholders as policy is developed in this area.

Mrs Barton: While the support that has been provided gives a degree of stability to the farming community, what steps will you put in place in preparation for post-2022 to plan for the allocation of future funding to ensure the continuation of that stability for the agricultural community?

Mr Poots: The first element of achieving that stability is to achieve a similar amount of money, if possible. Obviously, that has happened for the year 2020. Moving forward, we will contend that that is what Northern Ireland agriculture needs. The second element of having stability is to identify how we distribute that £293 million or the amount that we get. I want to see as much of that as possible going to productive farms, as opposed to people who own large quantities of land but do not do work on it. I want to encourage younger people into farming. Obviously, they do not have large tracts of land or land banks, so we need to incentivise them. All of those things need to be looked at. It will be for me, in conjunction with the Committee and the House, after discussion with the various stakeholders, to identify a way forward.

Mr McAleer: I note the Minister's comments about the coupled payments. Will the coupled payments that he is referring to be in addition to the area-based payments, as opposed to being instead of them?

Mr Poots: Area-based payments will remain: let us be clear about that. That will always be a proportion of the payments. It is about how we distribute other elements of that and whether we can reduce the amount that goes to area-based payments and use more of it to encourage production-based, particularly for young people who want to come home and engage in farming. Many young men and women across the country would enjoy a farming career but do not own land, whilst there are others who own land but do not want to farm. I want to encourage the people who want to farm, not the people who want to own land.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I should have said, "Topical question 5 has been withdrawn"; I did not withdraw Mr Durkan's question without his permission. Questions 2 and 13 have been grouped.

Bovine TB: Eradication Measures

2. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, considering the bovine tuberculosis (bTB) programme in 2018-19 cost £40.18 million, of which £23.6 million was paid in compensation,

what further measures will be taken to eradicate the ongoing problem of bTB and mitigate its effects to the local farming sector. (AQO 137/17-22)

13. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on bovine tuberculosis in Northern Ireland. (AQO 148/17-22)

Mr Poots: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 13 together.

I am keenly aware of the financial and personal costs that a bovine tuberculosis outbreak has on local farming families and businesses. I am also extremely conscious of the large amount of public money that is spent on tackling TB in Northern Ireland each year. I am pleased to report that, as a result of declining disease levels, the compensation bill is expected to fall to around £18.5 million this financial year. However, an overall bTB programme cost of £36 million is still far too high. Therefore, implementing new measures as part of a clear strategy to reduce bovine TB in Northern Ireland is a key priority for me.

Over the past couple of years, my Department has been developing a new bovine TB eradication strategy in response to the recommendations made by the independent TB strategic partnership group in 2016. The Department's response to those recommendations was the subject of a public consultation from November 2017 to February 2018. The strategy proposes to reduce bovine TB levels by comprehensively addressing all the recognised key factors in the spread of the disease. It makes recommendations covering six key areas, ranging from herd health management and research to more complex issues such as compensation levels and wildlife intervention that will require public consultation and new legislation. Officials will shortly present me with detailed options on the proposed strategy recommendations that I will consider with a view to implementing them as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr Dunne: Does the Minister recognise the severe impact that TB has on the dairy sector and on farmers who have lost high-quality pedigree milk cows from their herd? Will he outline what is being done to reduce the risk of transmission of the disease from wild animals?

Mr Poots: Yes, I recognise it. I know farmers who have lost hundreds of animals, and the damage to them mentally and the stress caused are huge. In many cases, the family line of the animal has been in the herd for 20 or 30 years and the farmer has been developing those genetics for many years. Excellent cows are being removed from the system, but they are not removing the source of the problem.

The science is there. We are able to link badgers and other wildlife, including deer — but badgers, in particular — to that particular type of TB. There is a wide range of TB across Northern Ireland. You get a different source of TB in mid-Down from that in south Down, that in Armagh, that in Fermanagh and so forth. Each type can be linked to the wildlife in each area. We have some very high concentrations of badgers, and they have very high levels of TB. It is in the interests of the welfare of both the bovine and the wildlife population to ensure that we eradicate the TB, and we are not doing that by just killing the cows.

Mr Irwin: The Minister is acutely aware of the situation with TB, but does he accept that the test that we use today

is the same as the test that was used 50 and 60 years ago? There are new technologies and new tests being looked at: will the Minister undertake to look into those? We are told that some of the new technologies and tests can clear out TB at a much faster rate.

Mr Poots: We are spending £24 million on the testing, which is on the veterinary side of things and is a huge proportion of the money that we spend on trying to control TB. Over quite a number of years, that has been rising. Thankfully, the rate has fallen in the past couple of years after new measures were put in place. There is little more that can be asked of the farming community; it is for the veterinary side to do its bit and the political side to do its bit. That involves making tough decisions, maybe controversial decisions. Nonetheless, they are decisions that will improve the welfare of the wildlife population and the bovine population and, at the same time, reduce the spend from the public purse. To me, that is the wise way of dealing with the issue.

Ms Sheerin: I note that the Minister stated previously that he was considering a wildlife intervention. Is he minded to consider a wildlife intervention similar to that which has been implemented in the Twenty-six Counties?

Mr Poots: I remember being in a meeting with Simon Coveney when he was Agriculture Minister and I was Environment Minister. At that stage, they had only started the process. The evidence base now exists in the South of Ireland. It is an evidence base that we are happy to use, and I have a preference for what is being done in the South of Ireland over what is being done in England. I do not think that there should be a widespread cull of badgers. There should be a targeted cull so that, where the evidence base exists and the veterinary people can identify the source of the problem that is causing devastation in the bovine herd, we can do something about it. Where there is no evidence base that that exists, we should not cull the wildlife. I would be totally opposed to that.

Miss Woods: With regard to the Department's response to the TB strategic partnership group's recommendations to eradicate bovine TB and given the strong opposition from wildlife trusts, conservation organisations, academics and the general public, will the Minister rule out the culling of healthy badgers?

Mr Poots: Essentially, that is what I have just said. Our target should be the areas with badgers that have been extensively contaminated with TB. The science — the work that has been done behind the scenes — indicates that we have had really significant breakdowns in the bovine herd. When an analysis of the badger population has been carried out, it has been found that it has an even greater intensity of TB. I make a plea to the House: if you are really concerned about the welfare of the wildlife, why not remove the wildlife that spreads infection constantly to other wildlife? That is what is needed here. We need to deal with the problem. We have, largely, a wildlife-to-bovine spread. There could be some bovine-to-wildlife spread, but we are removing the bovines; we are not removing the wildlife. It is nonsensical, it is expensive and I do not believe that it is in the interests of the farming community or, indeed, of the environmentalists who want a healthy wildlife population in our country. I want a healthy wildlife population in our country. I have badgers on my property, and I would not let anybody touch them, because they do not cause problems. However, two or three miles

up the road, others are plagued with TB coming from the badger population in that area, and something needs to be done for those people.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for highlighting the problem that exists in wildlife and how TB can adversely affect wildlife as well as our farmers. The Minister mentioned deer: has there been any testing or consideration of testing deer herds in Northern Ireland or, for that matter, any wild deer that may have been found dead at the roadside to establish whether this is a problem in the deer population in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: The deer population is not as extensive as the badger population, but deer are known to be carriers of TB. I am interested in looking at that because testing is not currently carried out on domesticated deer. I will raise that with my Chief Veterinary Officer and his team. Among the real spreaders of TB are llamas and alpacas. People import them, thinking that they are nice and cute. However, the fact that they spit quite a lot causes considerable spread of TB, if they happen to have it, so they can be very contagious. That is something to be cautious about.

Landfill Waste

3. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of ongoing opposition to an incinerator at Hightown quarry, Mallusk, what consideration his Department is giving to alternative approaches to managing landfill waste. (AQO 138/17-22)

Mr Poots: The current Northern Ireland waste management strategy focuses on moving waste up the waste hierarchy away from landfill, and that includes recovery such as energy from waste, recycling, preparing for reuse and waste prevention. Legislation and initiatives arising from the strategy have contributed to a significant increase in the tonnage of local authority-collected municipal waste that has been diverted from landfill, especially to recycling, in recent years.

During 2019, the Northern Ireland household waste recycling rate surpassed 50% for the first time, which meant that the EU and waste management strategy target of 50% recycling by 2020 has been met ahead of schedule.

4.30 pm

I am determined to build on that success and reduce the amount of residual waste. The current £23 million household waste recycling collaborative change programme provides financial support to local councils to increase recycling rates further and improve the quality of recycling. To date, I have made £3.45 million available for four projects. Ideally, I wish to see waste minimised and any waste that does arise to be recycled. However, for the foreseeable future, a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's residual waste will have to undergo residual waste treatment and be sent to energy-from-waste facilities that extract at least some value from the waste through energy and heat. In that context, I am considering the strategic and long-term needs for residual waste management in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that he will be aware of my ongoing opposition, and, indeed, the cross-party opposition, to the proposed incinerator at Mallusk. He may be aware that I have

requested a meeting with him, along with No-Arc21, to discuss the need for any such facility.

How much waste is currently going to landfill and how much to Arc21?

Mr Poots: I am pleased to say that, as a result of the work that has been done, the figures for waste going to landfill have been coming down, and coming down quite steadily. Between 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2019, 26.5% of all waste went to landfill. That equates to 264,795 tons. Arc21's share of that is 182,506 tons, so the Arc21 area is currently producing 30.7%. Obviously, there is work to be done in the Arc21 area if the overall level for Northern Ireland is 26.5% and its level is 30.7%. More work can be done by Arc21 to reduce the amount of residual waste that is in the system.

Mr Boylan: Will the Minister commit to an ambitious strategy and targets for circular resource usage, recycling and upscaling of composting in the upcoming environment strategy? Does he feel that those are the best measures by which to reduce waste overall?

Mr Poots: I know that the Member has had an interest in the issue for a long time. It is something to which I am totally committed. When I was previously Environment Minister, we were recycling 30% and were told that we could not get to 50%. We brought about the reduce, reuse and recycle campaign, which helped us to achieve the 50% level that we are at now.

The circular economy seeks to change the focus of waste management from resource management to resource efficiency. That is critical to maximising the value of the waste resource and the impact of its use on the environment. We are promoting several initiatives that encompass the principles of the circular economy. Significant work has already been done on waste prevention and recycling initiatives. Another example is the prosperity agreements that are being developed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency with businesses. The agreements promote those circular activities and resource efficiency once again, while simultaneously ensuring positive business growth and development.

Dr Aiken: The Minister will be aware of the all-party opposition to the Hightown incinerator. Will he, unlike his predecessor, commit now and state categorically that he will not ask the Executive to subsidise perversely the amount of waste that may not have gone to the Hightown incinerator, in such a way that they would have been asked to subsidise Arc21 for renewable heat energy that was not going to produce any renewables, any heat and definitely not any energy?

Mr Poots: What I will commit to is to reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfill. We will ensure that we continue to increase the 50% figure. The composting that Mr Boylan referred to has been very successful. We need to extract as much out of that as possible. We need to continue to narrow and narrow the amount of residual waste that exists in Northern Ireland to a very small core.

Mr Dallat: I extend my good wishes to the new Minister and welcome his commitment to reducing landfill. Alternatives sometimes present their own problems, not least in the agriculture industry. Will the Minister outline his proposals to work with the farming industry to ensure

that high levels of ammonia nitrates are reduced? Does he have the resources to do that?

Mr Poots: More resources, please. I will always take a few pounds to help you achieve what the Assembly wants to achieve, which is less pollution in our environment, greater use of nutrients for the good, more waste recycling for the good and more waste being resourced to produce energy. We will do all those things, and the more you can persuade Minister Murphy to send us a few pounds, the easier it will be for this Minister to achieve it.

Mr Blair: Is the Minister actively considering, in addition to the public interest and the opposition referred to in the original question, the public expenditure element of the arguments about the Mallusk site? In relation to value for money, is he considering the fact that Northern Ireland may not need a number of these facilities and that alternatives already exist? In addition, the structure of waste management currently —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member is allowed one question.

Mr Blair: — used in local government may not be effective, and also —.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. Order. The Member is allowed one question. He is attempting three. *[Laughter.]* I think the Minister got the gist of what the Member was driving at.

Mr Poots: Outline business cases are done on the economics of all these things, which are for the Department of Finance to review. The Member makes a point that will be considered by people, particularly in the Department of Finance, that these things need to stack up financially. In Northern Ireland, we have had too many schemes that have not delivered and been very expensive to the public purse. We need to stop doing that and ensure that we always spend money wisely.

Ms Bailey: It is great to hear about all the initiatives and how recycling rates have grown. Obviously, incinerators need waste — they need to be fed on waste — but we also have to meet waste reduction targets. Rather than just recycling or circular economies, will the Minister give us more detail on what we are doing to reduce our waste in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: I talked to my departmental officials and indicated that I want us to work on achieving a target of no plastic going to waste over the next five years. We need to look at fairly significant aims if we are to tackle the issue. Ten years ago, people thought that 50% was a significant aim, and that has been achieved. Let us achieve more, in all areas of recycling. Indeed, let us achieve more in all areas of producing waste that is not needed in the first instance. Many large supermarkets and other bodies use far too much packaging. We need to reduce packaging and challenge people about the packaging that they are producing in the first instance.

Coastal Waters

4. **Dr Aiken** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Great Britain on the preservation of Northern Ireland's coastal waters for local fishing vessels. (AQO 139/17-22)

Mr Poots: I discussed the introduction of the Fisheries Bill in the House of Lords with George Eustice MP, now Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Fisheries Bill provides a new policy framework to allow the UK to manage its fisheries as an independent coastal state. The Bill includes provisions on access to fisheries and the regulation of foreign fishing boats. In future, EU and other non-UK fishing boats will have to comply with the terms of any access agreement that has been agreed between the EU, or their flag state, and the UK. The UK Government want to ensure compliance with access conditions by extending the current licensing arrangements for UK fishing boats to foreign fishing boats as well. In that way, we can control who is fishing, where they can fish and what they can take from our waters. During 2020, the UK Government and the EU will hold talks about a new fisheries agreement, and that will include any future access to each other's waters. In that regard, I advised Minister Eustice that the Northern Ireland fishing fleet has worked hard to become the most active in the Irish Sea and that I expect it to benefit from any future agreement with the EU.

Dr Aiken: Can the Minister outline any discussions he has had with the Royal Navy, the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency or the Isle of Man Government to protect our waters from foreign vessels that could fish in our areas from 1 January next year?

Mr Poots: Discussions with those bodies will lie with Westminster as opposed to me. I believe that it is very important we have the right level of protection for our fishing boats and our fishing waters to ensure that people who fish there and who use and take that resource we have and own are there properly and that people who are there illegally are dealt with in the appropriate manner.

Ms Ennis: Does the Minister intend to ensure that EU funding for local fishing vessels will be protected in the fisheries Bill? If so, can he provide details?

Mr Poots: I know that the Member represents two fishing ports. It is important we recognise the needs of the local fishing community. They should have access to be able to carry out their fishing, because over the last 30 years, we have seen decline, decline, decline in our fishing community. At this moment in time, the message coming from the European Union is that it wants to see more decline in the Northern Ireland fishing industry. It wants all the fish that are landed to go through a customs check because they have been caught in UK waters and landed in the single market. They want to charge tariffs on fish caught in the Irish Sea and landed in Northern Ireland. I find that unacceptable, and I have already challenged our Government on how they will stand up to the EU. I certainly will not be found wanting in standing up to the EU. It has pillaged and raped our waters for years, and we will not tolerate that kind of action, which will destroy our fishing communities even further than they have been to this point.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McGrath: What discussions has the Minister had with his counterparts in the South about shared fishing grounds beyond the EU agreements?

Mr Poots: I raised that with Minister Coveney, but Minister Coveney cannot speak to me because Minister Coveney does not have authority over his own waters. That has

to be done with the European Union. I wanted to discuss the matter with Minister Coveney, but, because he is a subservient subject of the European Union, he was not able to have that discussion.

Ms Armstrong: I will follow that up by asking the Minister whether he has had any clarification at all about where the border will be in the Irish Sea.

Mr Poots: Given that all the waters between Scotland and Northern Ireland, and England and Northern Ireland, are UK waters, they will all count. You could catch a fish 100 metres from the shore and the EU would want you to go through a customs arrangement. I hope that it will change its mind and that it is just a negotiating position.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Mark Durkan. Be mindful that we have about two minutes.

Milk Exports

5. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what discussions have taken place regarding the continuing export of milk to the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 140/17-22)

Mr Poots: During preparations for the UK's exit from the EU, my Department's regular, routine engagement, which includes conference calls, emails and meetings, continued at a technical level with the dairy industry, DEFRA and DAFM. During the transition period following the UK's exit from the EU, the export of raw milk from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland continues as previously. After the transition period, under the Northern Ireland protocol, raw milk will still be able to be exported to the Republic of Ireland without tariffs or additional checks.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for that answer. I had a wee bet with my colleague here that I could get the Minister to say "Derry". [Laughter.] This is obviously an issue of huge concern to dairy farmers. [Laughter.] Is the Minister in a position to give them any reassurance or confidence that he has had negotiations with the host country and that it will continue to accept bulk imports?

4.45 pm

Mr Poots: I will be perfectly honest: I do not want to see the milk processed in the Republic of Ireland; I want to see it processed here. I want the jobs to be here. I want to see milk plants in Artigarvan, which is not far from the Member's constituency, actually upping the amount of milk that is processed there. Too many large conglomerates have moved in, bought up milk plants in Northern Ireland, closed them down, taken all of the stuff south of the border and pay the milk farmers far too little for the good product that they produce. Milk farmers are not making money, as things stand, because we have two or three big conglomerates taking the milk off them and taking it down south. The conglomerates and the supermarkets are doing very well; meanwhile, the farmers struggle.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for "Pundonderry" for being very quick in his question. We move on to topical questions.

Farmers: Mental Ill Health

T1. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking

to tackle a 2020 farming reality, which is that a survey last year suggested that 81% of young farmers believe that mental ill health is the single biggest problem facing farmers today. (AQT 111/17-22)

Mr Poots: It is not just young farmers but all farmers who face the pressures: pressures of debt and poor cash flow and pressures that are outside their control, such as the weather or, sometimes, disease breakdown, which is outside their control and is transmitted to their herds. It has proven to be a very pressurised industry. It has also proven to be a very isolated industry. Many people work day after day and have only the company of Radio Ulster or Cool FM or whatever; they are not having a two-way conversation with people. Farmers operate in very challenging circumstances and, living in a rural area, can lack contact with others. Sometimes, the younger farmers have better opportunities because they are more up to date with social media and have the modern technology to engage in that.

We have a series of things, such as Farm Family, Focus Farms and rural support, that offer support in mental health for farmers and people who engage in such activity and face challenges. I always encourage people to look to those groups, because they have good knowledge of what is going on. I have spoken to Minister Swann to offer my support and to do anything I can not just for farmers but for rural mental health in general. We will work collaboratively on that, which is something that he is willing to do.

Mr Butler: The Minister stole my thunder for my supplementary question. Is the Minister satisfied with the strategies that are currently in place in the Department of Agriculture for tackling mental ill health and suicide prevention?

Mr Poots: I do not think anybody can be satisfied when, across the Province, we lose round about one person every day through suicide. That is what it was at the worst of the Troubles and when road accidents were taking that sort of number. We could not tolerate the Troubles, rightly, and we could not tolerate those numbers of deaths on the roads, so we should not tolerate those numbers of suicides. The House cannot solve all of this ourselves, but we, in conjunction with others, can certainly help in reducing the prevalence of this awful thing that happens in our society.

Food Quality Regulations

T2. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussions he has had with the agri-food sector about post-Brexit food quality regulations. (AQT 112/17-22)

Mr Poots: I met some sectors, but not all, post Brexit. One of the things that we have discussed is the integrity of the UK market beyond Brexit. Ultimately, if something enters the European Union, it can make all of its passage through that single market, and, once it gets to Northern Ireland, it is still in the single market but can then enter the GB market, because we are part of the UK. There are significant problems in that.

The Member asked about the quality of materials that are here. I think, from discussions that I have been having, that, even if GB breaks away from European regulations, it will seek equivalence on these issues. That is not a done

deal; those are discussions that are taking place. In any event, as a result of the protocol, we will remain with EU regulations in Northern Ireland, so nothing should change.

Ms Dillon: Minister, what conversations have you had with the British Government about that? I am sure that you are well aware — we can make as much politics out of this as we want, or we can be real about it — that the agri-food sector is genuinely concerned about what will happen with food quality. What discussions have you had with the British Government to ensure that regulations do not break with EU regulations on food quality?

Mr Poots: Today, I had an IMG meeting with colleagues from Scotland and Wales, and representatives from the national Government were in attendance. Next month, we will focus on that very issue; for example, food that may have been treated with hormones or is GM and so forth. Those are all issues of public concern, and, consequently, we need to identify them as we do deals with the rest of the world, so that we compete on a level playing field. The last thing that Northern Ireland needs is produce that is not as good as ours coming in and undercutting our quality produce and a product that is less good being offered to people as a result.

Flooding: August 2017

T3. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, after congratulating the Principal Deputy Speaker on his new role and welcoming the Minister back to ministerial office and wishing him well in his role, for an update on what action has been taken to support those farmers who suffered incredible losses as a consequence of the devastating floods of August 2017, given that he will be aware that, following that flooding in the north-west, many constituents in those rural communities, particularly the Glenelly valley, faced significant financial hardship, with no form of redress or support provided to them in the absence of these institutions, with Mr McCrossan having had many meetings with permanent secretaries Noel Lavery and Denis McMahon in the absence of a Minister, who assured him that, when a Minister was in place, funding would be provided. (AQT 113/17-22)

Mr Poots: That matter was raised with me by the farmers' union, and it has been raised by other constituency colleagues of Mr McCrossan. I know that the farmers' union visited Glenelly the day after the flooding happened. They were just astonished at the amount of water that was coming downriver, the damage that was done to fencing and the large quantities of silt on the grassland — absolutely choking it — that had to be cleared. I know that the farmers had to carry out extensive work and to pay out a large amount of money. We continue to discuss this in the Department to see whether we can find a way forward.

Mr McCrossan: I know that the Minister feels strongly about this, particularly given his background in the farming sector. I was on the ground throughout that week or 10 days and have seen some of the scenes that you described. I do not know whether you have seen some of the video footage that exists. It was hugely devastating to the north-west. Minister, when Primark went on fire, the Departments closed ranks quickly and provided necessary funding for Belfast city centre. The view is that that did not happen in my constituency. Will the Minister accept

that there is a clear disparity, when it comes to the north-west, for funding of crises such as that, particularly given what happened at Primark and the public funds that were allocated to the crisis that faced Belfast at that time?

Mr Poots: I accept that people in that area perhaps feel abandoned. I recognise that they have personally picked up a lot of cost without having had any recompense. It was a natural disaster; it is something that you cannot insure for. I understand all of that and accept it. At the moment, it has been suggested to me by the Department that it does not represent value for money for it, because a lot of the work has been done. If we go down the route of hardship funding, that is something that I will have to do as a ministerial direction, as opposed to having advice from the Department that I should do that. That is something that I have not ruled out doing.

Slurry Spreading

T4. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, whilst acknowledging that he cannot be held responsible for the weather, to state whether he has given any consideration to the difficulties that farmers are experiencing around slurry spreading, given that the period for spreading slurry opened on 1 February, with only four suitable dry days to do that safely since that date. (AQT 114/17-22)

Mr Poots: I spoke to a contractor who does that work extensively in the country and was not able to get out at all last week as a consequence of the weather. Yet, the month of January was an exceptionally good month. Here I am going on about the EU again, but it produced a proposal, worked with our Departments and came up with the closed period.

Blunt instruments do not cut it. We need a flexibility that prevents nitrates and phosphates getting into our waterways, because we know that they do damage, but we need to do that in a sensible and rational way. I have asked my officials to look at how we could amend the period to something that takes better account of the weather conditions. I have seen this happening all too often. We get to February and a bad spell of weather, and that leads to animal welfare considerations. As a result, someone is put in a position where they have not been allowed to spread slurry. They have obeyed the law, the tanks have filled up and it is too wet to go out. They either spread slurry and damage the environment or they do not spread slurry and end up in an animal welfare situation, which is not a good place for anybody to be.

Ms S Bradley: Given that the Minister has suggested that he is limited by nobody and master of his own destiny on this, can he give early assurance or direction to those farmers? As he rightly pointed out, it is not just about health and safety but about the pollution risk. Is there a timeline within which farmers can expect to hear some type of guidance?

Mr Poots: From now until the middle of October, we are in the open season. Nonetheless, rules apply, and people should not spread slurry in conditions such as those that we have seen over the last week — and they have not been doing so; certainly not that I have witnessed. As we move forward, I would like to have something in place for the next closed season so that we can identify a better way forward, one that observes the nitrates directive

in a very positive way but also creates flexibility for the farming community so that it can better do its job. That will involve further negotiation with the European Union, and, unfortunately, I am not the master of everything. It would be very kind if the Member could give that to me.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Topical question no 5, in the name of Mr Pat Sheehan, has been withdrawn.

Trade Negotiations: Post-Brexit

T6. **Mr Harvey** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on his Department's readiness for the next stage of the post-Brexit trade negotiations. (AQT 116/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department and the Department for the Economy are the most public-facing when it comes to EU trade. We are working extensively on that issue, particularly the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) controls. A lot of people talked about the milk trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the run-up to the Brexit negotiations, but they seemed to forget that over 50% of goods that come into and go out of Northern Ireland happen to go to Great Britain. Consequently, we need to ensure that there are no tariffs between us and Great Britain. As things stand, that is not guaranteed. We should be totally resistant to that, because it would have a devastating impact on us if we ended up with tariffs. It is no good not having tariffs from Northern Ireland to Great Britain; we need zero tariffs between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Otherwise, it will have a devastating impact on consumers in Northern Ireland and, indeed, on business.

Mr Harvey: Does the Minister believe that Brexit will offer the fishing industry considerable opportunities?

5.00 pm

Mr Poots: It absolutely does, because we have a rich harvest on our own property and in our own waters that we can use ourselves. However, we need sensible behaviour from all those who are engaged in negotiations to ensure that our fishermen have the right to catch, land and, I hope, process fish in Northern Ireland before it goes on elsewhere. A lot of opportunities exist for coastal towns, particularly Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie, to support rural communities and to create jobs for men and women across the sector. I trust that those opportunities will be taken up and that we will see a real, dramatic difference in those communities over the next number of years, but we need people to be sensible.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up. I thank the House for indulging me. That is the first time that I have chaired Question Time, so I appreciate your indulgence.

Adjourned at 5.01 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 February 2020

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Members, before we proceed with today's business, I want to make a few general points.

First, I acknowledge the huge amount of work that has been done by Committees in recent weeks to scrutinise the significant amount of secondary legislation laid by Departments over the last three years. While more attention is often given to plenary sittings, this emphasises the crucial role of Committees in the Assembly.

Secondly, I wrote to Ministers last week with a reminder for all Departments of the key procedures and conventions to be observed towards the Assembly and that the Assembly should be the place where key issues are debated in the first instance. As we return to the normal pattern of two plenary sittings each week, I want to underline my focus on ensuring that our business is conducted properly and fairly. I ask Members to note how vital this is towards building confidence in the Assembly.

On points of order, I genuinely welcome procedural concerns that Members may want to raise with me, and I will endeavour to deal with them seriously and fairly. As in other places, if Members can give me advance notice of a point of order, it will make it more likely that I can give them a considered response at the time.

Finally, I recognise the work that has been done by Assembly and party staff in the past six weeks. In my role as Speaker, and on behalf of the whole Chamber, I formally record my thanks to Assembly staff. The last three years created particular disruption and uncertainty for them, but, since early January, they have worked tirelessly in challenging circumstances to ensure that we have been able to resume our business almost seamlessly. Although I have been a Member since 1998, in this role, I get a much greater insight into the work that goes on behind the scenes. I know how personally committed the staff are to the importance of the work that we have to do, so it is fitting that I formally record my and our appreciation to them this afternoon.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to what you just said, you did get some short notice of this point of order. The first item of business today is a motion to establish an Ad Hoc Committee:

"to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights".

If I understand correctly, the House is not to be permitted to debate or amend that motion. All that the House is permitted to do is to vote on it. Why, since Standing Order 53 places no prohibition on debate when the establishment

of an Ad Hoc Committee is the subject matter, are we to be denied the right to debate a motion such as this? More than that, my understanding is that, if the motion is passed, the names of those who will serve on this Ad Hoc Committee are never to be put to the House. Normally, when we establish Committees, we name them in a subsequent motion and approve the individuals. However, in this case, I am informed by the Business Office that there will be no follow-up motion. All we have is the carve-up between the parties, and they then choose the individuals. The House, in whose name this Committee is being established, can neither debate its establishment nor the names of those appointed to it. How does that fit with good order and with the credibility of the House?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for raising that point of order. I also thank him for giving me some notice, even though it was short. As I said, it helps in my preparation of a response.

I am content that the motion is in order, insofar as it reflects the decisions taken, and the manner in which they are taken, by the Business Committee in the establishment of Ad Hoc Committees. The motion was agreed by the Business Committee and scheduled for today's sitting following consultation with party Whips and representatives.

I have a certain empathy for Mr Allister's concern that we do not have an opportunity to debate the motion. Whatever about the particular motion in today's Order Paper, I empathise with him insofar as I will not be wedded to convention being the underpinning principle that allows every future motion to go forward. As far as I am concerned, the motion in the Order Paper is appropriate and in order, but I will bring it back to the Business Committee to discuss for future reference. I commit to doing that.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, it is of little comfort that, for the future, this issue might be addressed. The reality remains that, today, the Assembly is being asked to set up a Committee that it cannot debate. It seems that there was debate in the Business Committee, but not in the House. Surely, the House should make this decision. If it is then compounded by the fact that we will not even be able to know, by notice, who is serving on this Committee, we could well arrive at the farcical situation where an Ad Hoc Committee to deal with human rights issues could be peopled, in part, by human rights abusers. There may be put on this Committee, unknown to the House, those who are human rights abusers by virtue of the fact that they are convicted terrorists who abused, in that role, the human rights of others. The farce could get

even more extreme than it already is. I implore you, sir, to refer this back to the Business Committee and let it draft a motion that can be debated in the House.

Mr Speaker: I made the point, Mr Allister, that the motion in today's Order Paper is in order. I made a commitment to take it back to the Business Committee for further discussion and future reference. I have no doubt that the Member will have ample opportunity to discuss and consider the business of the proposed Ad Hoc Committee in due course, as all Members have the right and ability to do.

Bill of Rights: Ad Hoc Committee

Mr Speaker: The next item in the Order Paper is a motion regarding the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee to consider the creation of a bill of rights. The motion will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That, as provided for in Standing Order 53(1), this Assembly appoints an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the creation of a bill of rights as set out in paragraph 28 of part 2 of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document; and to submit a report to the Assembly by 28 February 2022.

Composition: Democratic Unionist Party, 2; Sinn Féin, 2; Social Democratic and Labour Party, 1; Ulster Unionist Party, 1; Alliance Party, 1.

Quorum: The quorum shall be five members except when no decision is taken or question put to the Committee, when the quorum shall be four.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine. — [Mr O'Dowd.]

Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4): Suspension

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 24 February 2020.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that this motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 24 February 2020.

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 and Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Estimates and Vote on Account 2020-21

Mr Speaker: The next two motions relate to the Supply resolutions, and, as usual, there will be a single debate on both motions. I shall ask the Clerk to read the first motion on the 2019-2020 spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) then call on the Minister to move it. The Minister will then commence the debate on both motions. When all who wish to speak have done so or when the time limit is reached, I shall put the Question on the first motion. The second motion, the 2020-21 Vote on Account, will then be read into the record, and I will call the Minister to move it. The Question will then be put on that motion. If that is clear, I shall proceed.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £17,519,166,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 and that resources, not exceeding £21,022,321,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 2(c) and 3(c) of table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,962,895,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 and that resources, not exceeding £9,054,440,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4 and 6 of table 1 in the Northern Ireland Estimates and Vote on Account 2020-21 that was laid before the Assembly

on 19 February 2020. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to four and a half hours for this debate. The Minister will have up to 60 minutes to allocate at his discretion between proposing and making his winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have 10 minutes. I call on the Minister to open the debate on the motion.

Mr Murphy: As you have set out, Cheann Comhairle, this debate covers the Supply resolutions. The first resolution seeks the Assembly's approval of the 2019-2020 spending plans of Departments and other public bodies as set out in the spring Supplementary Estimates. The SSEs were laid in the Assembly on Wednesday 19 February 2020. Alongside the SSEs, the 2020-21 Vote on Account was also laid, and it will be the subject of the second Supply resolution. I will now speak to both of those.

The first resolution before the House relates to the supply of cash and the use of resources for the current year, 2019-2020, as set out in the spring Supplementary Estimates. In the absence of an Executive during 2019, the Secretary of State took the 2019-2020 Main Estimates through Westminster last October. Normally, the Main Estimates would be approved in June. However, because of delays in getting this timetabled at Westminster until October, that meant that, while the Main Estimates were based on the Budget, which the Secretary of State announced back in February 2019, they were updated to reflect the latest in-year position agreed by the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) at that time. Since the Main Estimates in October 2019 and prior to the restoration of the Executive, the Department of Finance continued to manage the public expenditure position, including the reallocation of resources when Departments declared reduced requirements and surrendered any funding no longer required.

Since the Executive were restored last month, I have announced an outcome of the January monitoring round, including allocations of £35.8 million resource and £5.8 million capital from the funding that the block has received as a result of an updated forecast of regional rate income, the impact of Barnett changes being finalised as part of the Westminster Supplementary Estimate process and funding previously set aside for particular purposes not being required and, therefore, being made available for allocation to Departments. These are the allocations being authorised through the spring Supplementary Estimates, which we are debating today. The focus of the January monitoring round was to ensure that all funds available from easements are allocated to Departments. It was not meant to address significant pressures, and I ensured that all available resource and capital was allocated to Departments.

Since then, Treasury has made some late adjustments through the Barnett formula, making some £18 million of resource available, and you will be aware from my written statement last week that I have allocated that. I have kept my commitment to the Infrastructure Minister to provide more funding for winter services, street lighting and other road maintenance, with the majority of the remaining available funding going to fund pressures in our schools.

12.15 pm

Alongside the SSEs for 2019-2020, there is also a Vote on Account. The Vote on Account provides an initial allocation for 2020-21 in order to ensure that Departments can continue to deliver services until the Main Estimates are presented to the Assembly for approval in June. I emphasise that the Vote on Account does not represent the setting of a Budget for 2020-21. The amount for each Department in the Vote on Account is, in most cases, set at approximately 45% of the 2019-2020 provision, in order to authorise sufficient cash and resources to ensure that services can continue to be delivered through the summer. The Executive will set a 2020-21 Budget in the coming weeks, and I will bring that Budget to the Assembly, but neither today's debate nor tomorrow's debate on the Budget Bill are about that.

There are a number of procedural issues that I must also address. First, on behalf of the Executive, I request and recommend the levels of Supply set out in the two resolutions, under section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Also, as is normally the case for a Budget Bill, accelerated passage is required for the legislation. Indeed, there is specific provision for that in Assembly Standing Orders, under Standing Order 42. I understand that the Finance Committee has already agreed to grant the Bill accelerated passage, and I place on record my appreciation of the Committee's vital role in agreeing that important step in the financial process.

I am sure that Members are aware that today's debate is time-limited, and I encourage Members to use their limited time to focus on the issues that relate specifically to the 2019-2020 Supply resolution before us. The Estimates are seen by many as complex and difficult to understand, and I agree with that assessment. However, it is imperative that we as an Assembly recognise that the Budget Bill, underpinned by the spring Supplementary Estimates, is the key legislation for delivering funding to vital public services, such as schools and hospitals. The public services that are underpinned by that legislation in turn support the wider economy, and it is vital that we debate the legislation and pass it expediently.

As we know, the public-expenditure environment will continue to be challenging, especially set against the background of Brexit and the effects of austerity policies, which continue to damage our public services. When I bring the Executive's 2020-21 Budget, Members will have every opportunity to debate the issues, not just when the Budget is announced but when I bring the 2020-21 Main Estimates and the Budget (No. 2) Bill to the Assembly later in the year.

I look forward to putting the Executive's final spending plans for 2019-2020 on a legal footing through the spring Supplementary Estimates before you today, together with the corresponding Budget Bill that we will debate tomorrow. I request Members' support for the resolution for 2019-2020 and also for the resolution for the Vote on Account to allow services to continue to be funded into the first few months of 2020-21.

Dr Aiken (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance): I thank the Minister for his opening remarks and for his explanation of the spring Supplementary Estimates and, indeed, the Vote on Account. At its meeting on 19 February, the Committee for Finance took evidence from

Department of Finance officials on the SSEs for 2019-2020 and the Vote on Account for 2020-21. Although those are typically considered routine requirements, they can, by necessity, be quite technical. I thank the departmental officials for their assistance to the Committee in that regard.

During the evidence session, the Committee examined the reconciliation between the departmental expenditure limit (DEL) figures in the Main Estimate Budget position and the SSE Budget position before us today. It was an exercise during which the Committee received clarification from departmental officials on the extent of the in-year changes to the resource and capital allocations for 2019-2020 for a number of Departments, particularly as those changes occurred while the Assembly was not sitting. In some instances, the figures involved were substantial. I shall not get into the specific figures for individual Departments on the in-year movement of money, suffice it to note that just over £150 million was made in resource allocations and almost £64 million in capital allocations.

It is important to place on the record that, under the prevailing extenuating circumstances, neither I nor the Committee considers the business being debated today to be routine in the traditional sense. The political instability that occurred over recent years meant, that in the absence of the Assembly and Committees, the process, as has already been mentioned by the Minister, was overseen by the Secretary of State. It was important for the Finance Committee to establish clarity on these significant adjustments as it exercises a cross-cutting scrutiny function in respect of Budget Bills. Moreover, the scale of these technical changes, combined with the cumulative changes resulting from the normal reallocation through monitoring rounds will, in some cases, have resulted in significant differences between the opening and closing resource and capital allocations of Departments.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Committee's discussions with departmental officials also covered a range of issues in respect of how future scrutiny will be facilitated by Departments for the forthcoming in-year monitoring rounds, as well as the departmental engagement that the Assembly and its Committees can expect in the formation of future draft Budgets.

During the Second Stage debate tomorrow I will go into more detail on the assurances that we received, but I wish to inform the House that there would appear to be a genuine desire to engage productively and meaningfully with the Assembly in order to facilitate robust financial scrutiny. I have no doubt that, over the remainder of this mandate, we will be faced with many challenges, necessitating focused financial scrutiny that will require Committees to work collaboratively with Departments. However, this must be underpinned by the fostering of relationships and a recognition by all Departments that there needs to be a robust challenge function by the Assembly to ensure that, in discharging our duties, we maximise the limited resources available to us to focus on the best possible outcomes in delivering our public services.

To achieve that, statutory Committees must continue to ensure that they fulfil their Budget-related statutory roles and responsibilities. It is essential that all scrutiny Committees continue to satisfy themselves as to the reasons for, as well as the timing of, any significant levels of easement or returns of moneys during the in-year monitoring process, and that the necessary assurances

have been received from Departments on any and all Committee concerns.

As I said earlier, in terms of the scrutiny of departmental input to the in-year monitoring rounds, the Assembly was not sitting during that time, and therefore has been unable to receive the associated departmental evidence sessions in advance of the June, October and January monitoring rounds. As we move into the new financial year, the Committee will take a keen interest not only in the Department's financial management of its own resources but in its coordination role in the in-year monitoring process.

The motion on the Vote on Account for 2020-21 is a practical measure that usually provides interim resources at approximately 45% of the 2019-2020 provisions until the Main Estimates and associated Budget Bill are agreed before the summer. As I will outline in tomorrow's debate on the Second Stage of the Budget Bill, the Committee for Finance has approved accelerated passage for the Bill, which will be introduced by the Minister later. In the meantime, on behalf of the Committee for Finance, I support the motions.

Miss McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Infrastructure): As Chair of the Committee for Infrastructure, I will take this opportunity to outline the Committee's consideration and views in respect of today's motions.

The expenditure of the Department for Infrastructure is one of the Executive's largest, and scrutiny of its budget is a key role for the Committee. In the short time that the Assembly has been back, the Committee has received a number of briefings on the Department's financial situation. Minister Mallon was invited to the Committee on 5 February to discuss her priorities for the Department. She outlined the financial challenges, and departmental officials briefed the Committee on the details of the Department's finances on 28 January and 19 February.

The stark financial situation faced by the Department was made clear. It is evidently a Department that has reached breaking point after years of underfunding and it is hard, as Chair of the Committee, to point to priorities for additional spend when so much of the Department has been depleted. The Committee notes that in the January monitoring round the Department made bids for £28.5 million of resource funding and £14.5 million of capital, and received £1 million of resource and £3.8 million of capital. The Department's bid requested funding for the Belfast transport hub, street lighting and roads maintenance, winter services, water mains replacement and the digital transformation of the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA). The largest bid by far, however, was for £19 million to address Translink's operating deficit. The £4.8 million received from the Department of Finance went to the Belfast transport hub, street lighting and winter services. It is to be welcomed that the Executive found an additional £3 million, which was announced by the Minister of Finance last week, that will go towards street lighting, road maintenance and winter services.

During her briefing to the Committee, the Minister was pressed about the severity of underfunding of these recurrent services. She highlighted that the required annual budget for street lighting repairs was £3.2 million, but that the current allocation had been £1 million. To clear the backlog alone would require an estimated £710,000.

The additional funding has ignored water mains replacement, digital transformation of DVA and, of course, funding for Translink. There has been a trend over recent years to ignore Translink's deficit. In briefings by the Minister and her officials, the Committee was advised that there were no further identifiable savings. While additional money through the monitoring round is obviously welcome, it is only a sticking plaster.

The Department has become increasingly dependent on monitoring rounds to deliver basic core services. As other Departments utilise their budgets better and surrender less, there is less funding at the monitoring rounds for the Department to make up its increasing shortfall. According to the Minister, Treasury approved the moving of £130 million from the capital grant into the resource block to supplement the shortfall. This position looks set to continue, but it is unsustainable.

Understandably, the Minister has allocated additional moneys to those aspects of her remit that protect lives, such as street lighting and road maintenance. However, because these are the areas most critical to fund, large swathes of the Department continue to be depleted.

I want to outline what a Department in financial crisis looks like. The Department for Infrastructure budget has a recurring structural deficit of £61 million going into the next financial year and due to rise to £80 million in 2021-22 and £90 million in 2022-23.

Within the area of water alone, there is shortfall in resource of £7 million. According to the Department, it has not been possible to fund Northern Ireland Water to the levels recommended by the Utility Regulator. New housing developments and businesses are not able to connect to the sewerage network in over 100 towns and villages across Northern Ireland. This has the potential to stagnate development, with various knock-on effects. The Minister advised the Committee that she intended to discuss Northern Ireland Water's organisation, borrowing powers and funding model with her Executive colleagues.

I have talked about the severely needed money that has been spent on roads. Funding has been pared back to such an extent that only a limited maintenance service exists, with much-reduced pothole repairs and half the number of grass cutting and gully emptying operations. Prior to the 2014-15 departmental budget reductions, the Department would have regularly allocated some £35 million to cover routine maintenance and meet winter requirements. In recent years, this budget has been cut by more than half.

As an asset, the Northern Ireland roads system is worth an estimated £40 billion, and experts suggest that £400 million should be spent each year just to maintain it. At best, the Department has managed only £75 million over the past few years. Underspensing on that level only stores up bigger problems, and officials noted that it takes four times more to repair than to maintain.

The Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety, and the budget for that has been significantly cut over the past number of years. The budget spend for 2010-11 was £1,703,256 and in 2011-12 was £2.5 million. The opening baseline budget for road safety advertising for 2018-19 was £700,000, and again for 2019-2020, representing a 30% reduction on the previous low allocation of £1 million in 2017-18.

The Department told the Committee of its ongoing support for community transport organisations. The Committee noted the Department's provision of £4.5 million to a number of them in 2019-2020 through the provisions of the rural transport fund and the transport programme for people with disabilities to deliver specialised and affordable transport. The Department made the point that, whilst this funding has remained the same as that in 2018-19, it is a reduction of almost 20% in the overall baseline since 2015-16.

12.30 pm

The Department's capital budget for 2019-2020 was £471 million. However, the Department pointed out that the requirement for 2020-21 is £795 million, increasing to £1.4 billion by 2022-23. In response to the Committee's question on how the Department prioritises its spending, the officials outlined that funding flagship projects, such as the major road upgrades, are at the top and, if approved by the Executive, the city deals are next. The Department noted that the Utility Regulator's determination on what Northern Ireland Water should get is inescapable. Next, there is critical rail safety work required. There is a contractual commitment in place to buy new carriages for the rail network and for new buses. There is also a need to find money for Waterways Ireland and the continued funding of the design phase of York Street.

It is a Department with severe pressures, a Department struggling to keep the infrastructure that we all rely on from breaking down irrevocably. For Northern Ireland Water, there is a requirement for £1.45 billion identified under the Living With Water programme. That will bring hugely increased demands on the capital budget over the next decade. Northern Ireland Water also urgently requires assistance on a sustainable funding agreement. Officials warned that, if the constrained budget settlement for the current price control rolls forward, choices will have to be made that will lead to failed outcomes for our environment and more frequent prosecutions, including increasing fines for pollution events. Additionally, economic growth in many areas across Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast, would need to be put on hold. On the road network, the recent Barton and Northern Ireland Audit Office reports on structural maintenance of the road network recommend that the Department of Finance and the Department for Infrastructure work towards ensuring funding of some £143 million per annum on a recurring basis to prevent further deterioration. Furthermore, additional funding is needed to address the £1.2 billion backlog of road maintenance. The Committee will, as always, do its best to scrutinise the work and budget of the Department, but, with such a depleted budget, it is difficult to critique a Department in such crisis.

I have left the matter of Translink and the now very real possibility that it will become insolvent to the end. That would be catastrophic for the transport infrastructure of Northern Ireland and would leave the Department in breach of its responsibilities. A number of reduced budgets for the Department have meant reduced budgets for Translink of around £13 million per year. Translink, therefore, ran its service at a deficit and used its reserves to supplement that. As the £19 million requested for Translink in the monitoring round was unsuccessful, its reserves next year will be below the level of working capital that it needs, and it may cease to be deemed a going concern, which is a critical issue facing the Department.

Given our ageing population, officials noted that the concessionary fares scheme is becoming more expensive and has risen to almost £50 million. The Department gives Translink only £40 million for the scheme. The Committee has sought comparable tables on concessionary fares in Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions. The Committee has also asked the Department whether the Department's underfunding of Translink is a breach of its contract under the public service agreement.

The Committee for Infrastructure will continue its scrutiny of the Department for Infrastructure's budget and especially the Minister's efforts to mitigate the impact of cuts.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I advise Members that, as everybody is being given up to 10 minutes to speak, if any Member takes an intervention, they will not get an additional minute.

Mr Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health): Fáilte roimh an deis páirt a ghlacadh i ndíospóireacht an lae inniu mar Chathaoirleach an Choiste Sláinte. I welcome the opportunity to address and participate in today's debate as Chair of the Health Committee. I acknowledge, in the first instance, the positive start to consideration of the Health and Social Care budget since the institutions were restored, in terms of early progress on addressing pay issues and a renewed commitment to the transformation agenda seen in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. I particularly welcome the resolution of pay issues for a workforce that continues to bear an unreasonable burden as pressures increase, along with the commitment to address safe staffing issues in partnership with staff representative bodies. I thank the Minister of Health for inviting me, on the Floor of the Chamber, to join the strategic health partnership forum. I confirm that I have accepted his invitation and look forward to working with all concerned on that important issue. I also acknowledge that the HSC budget this year will have exceeded 50% of the block grant. On the one hand, that demonstrates a welcome response to need, but it also underscores the urgent need for radical reform, as we have all agreed.

In recent weeks, the Committee heard evidence from the Department and from stakeholders of significant inflationary pressures of around 6% and inescapable pressures estimated at around £345 million, and that is before the transformation budget and New Decade commitments are added. While in-year monitoring moneys helped to bridge the gap last year between the original allocation and cost pressures, those funds are mostly non-recurrent and do not, therefore, allow for long-term planning. Of course, some of the increasing costs derive in part from success such as longer life expectancy and better medicines, which are to be welcomed, but the substantial impact on existing services inevitably makes transformation more difficult. While there is cross-party acknowledgement of the need for double running to allow transformation, we have not yet seen evidence that that necessary step will be possible at the scale required, which is, of course, a serious concern.

In 2016, the previous Committee heard evidence that, without adequate investment in transformation, hospital waiting lists would rise and GP practices would close. Members will know that that is, indeed, what has been happening, despite a wide range of initiatives being undertaken and £100 million having been invested in

transformation in each of the last two years. Last week, at the Health Committee, we heard that, without faster and further reform, patients could end up being bussed from Fermanagh and Tyrone to see GPs east of the Bann. Tá a fhios agam go rí-mhaith go bhfuil Comhaltaí ar gach taobh ag déanamh a ndíchill le cinnte a dhéanamh nach dtarlaíonn sin. I know that Members on all sides will want to do everything possible to prevent that from becoming a reality.

We know that it can be done, and we know how it can be done. We have cross-party agreement on the road map, including the roll-out of multidisciplinary teams with investment in primary and community care, as advised by countless reports over the years. Moreover, we know that, if done effectively, that investment will be repaid with early intervention, health promotion and prevention, which will ease pressure on acute care. Ní mór dúinn glacadh leis an riosca gur, gan maoiniú ceart, is deacair an t-athrú a mheas. We need to acknowledge the risk that, without sufficient funding, transformation becomes much more difficult. An example of that is the current substantial reliance on locum and agency staff. The Department is on record that, in the 12 months up to April 2019, the cost of temporary workers across Health and Social Care came to just over £200 million. That cost has more than trebled since 2014-15 and could clearly go some way towards achieving transformation, if workforce planning, recruitment and retention issues can be effectively addressed.

The Committee has asked questions about savings targets and the reliance on savings targets, which are acknowledged as unlikely to be achieved in some cases. Efficiency is clearly vital, but we will want to know that savings are achieved by strategic decision-making and not by opportunistic cuts where vacancies occur at random.

The new Committee is still at an early stage in its development, but we are already identifying issues that make it difficult to comment effectively on budget priorities. We cannot look at the papers supplied to the Committee thus far and identify, for example, how much, it is proposed, we spend on mental health and on cancer or the split between primary and acute care. Fantastic work may well be going on to address those balances and priorities, but previous Committees were not able to get clarity on that. We are, therefore, seeking further detail and enquiring about progress towards transparency and accessibility in our budgetary processes.

The move towards a three-year Budget has been widely supported and will be crucial for Health to move towards a process that will allow the long-term planning that is essential to reform. Go ceann piosa, is dúshlán ceart dár gcóras pleanáil fhad-téarmach a dhéanamh le buiséad aon bhliana. For now, though, proper long-term planning with a one-year Budget is a real challenge for our system.

I look forward to the coming year and to the chance to engage constructively on the spending plans for the reforms that we have. Ag deireadh an lae — at the end of the day — we have no choice but to deliver.

I now want to take a couple of moments to speak in my role as health spokesperson for Sinn Féin. Since the institutions were restored in January, progress has been made on addressing pay issues in the health sector. I welcome the resolution of pay issues for a workforce that continues to unselfishly bear the burdens in a health service that is starved through Tory austerity measures. I particularly

welcome the commitment to victims of the blood contamination scandal, with an extra payment of £1 million being made available by the Minister to those affected. The money is ring-fenced and is intended to alleviate hardship for those infected with hepatitis and HIV in the contaminated blood scandal. However, we are concerned that £400,000 of that has been withheld. I urge the Minister of Health to release the entire £1 million, as allocated. Victims and those affected by the blood contamination scandal have waited and suffered long enough.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. I know that he is speaking in his capacity as the Sinn Féin spokesperson, but, as the Chair of the Committee, he has insight into what is going on with the contaminated blood situation. He referred to the £400,000 that the Minister or the Department is holding back: will he tell us whether any light has been shone on why that is the case or why that has been proposed?

Mr Gildernew: I will leave it to the Minister to explain to the House why that is the case. I urge him to prioritise that spending immediately.

While we have renewed our commitment to the transformation agenda proposed by Bengoa and the then Health Minister, Michelle O'Neill, it is difficult to see how we can achieve that when we cannot afford the double running required to transform our health service. Just last week, we heard that the rate of GP closures in Fermanagh and parts of Tyrone — a largely rural area — means that patients could end up being bussed to see GPs. Transformation of the health service is vital if it is to serve the needs of our entire population across rural and urban communities, particularly the more deprived communities that already suffer unequal health outcomes in important measures of physical and mental health and well-being.

The transformation of particular components of the healthcare system — for example, reduced waiting lists and the provision of IVF treatment according to NICE recommendations — are just some of the many promises made in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. Not surprisingly, a Tory Government who have savaged public service funding for years may now also renege on many of the commitments they made in that agreement. We cannot be complacent when it comes to the health and well-being of our communities. Our responsibility as public servants is to come up with ideas that allow us to fulfil our duties to constituents. Tory austerity must be challenged through sound proposals that will allow us to address the pressures on the healthcare system and other public services. Increasing our suite of fiscal powers is one avenue that must be explored so that we, the public servants sitting in this institution, have the latitude to decide how we generate revenue and how best to spend that revenue so that the daily lives of our constituents are improved.

Our healthcare system has benefited from significant North/South cooperation in numerous and important ways, with our constituents feeling the benefits that come from the effective and efficient sharing of resources and the provision of health services across the entire island. We need to explore how we can generate further improvements for all our people in the time ahead. The work of the Health Minister in developing an all-Ireland paediatric pathology service is a fine example of how we can reach out to address key issues of concern in a way that meets the needs of our population most effectively.

I wish the Minister well in dealing with the many and complex challenges that he faces at this time.

Mr McGrath (The Chairperson of the Committee for The Executive Office): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate and thank the Minister of Finance for bringing it to the House.

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the specific challenges in this year's budget process. The absence of a fully functioning Government for three years has resulted in a compressed budget planning timetable, and, although unavoidable, it has had an impact on the time for engagement between Departments and Committees on budget planning. Nonetheless, it is important that Committees conduct their scrutiny in as thorough a manner as possible and despite the challenging circumstances.

Against that backdrop, the Committee received briefings on budget matters from departmental officials on 12 February and 19 February. Normally, the Committee is briefed in advance of the Department making monitoring returns, but that did not happen in 2019-2020.

12.45 pm

In the January 2020 monitoring round, the Executive Office was awarded just short of £1 million resource funding for preparation costs involved in taking forward the recommendations of the historical institutional abuse (HIA) inquiry and victims' payment service scoping study. It also received £0.3 million for the capital costs incurred in taking forward the HIA recommendations. It is widely accepted that the HIA redress scheme will have a sizeable long-term financial impact, and it is not surprising that the exact costs are hard to predict at this stage. However, the Department has estimated that the cost could be between £25 million and £60 million for the 2020-21 period. Given the scale of those costs, it is not possible for them to be absorbed within the Department's existing budget, and the source of funding for the scheme must be clarified as a matter of urgency. The Committee resolutely believes that funding for the scheme should be met centrally from the block grant. Notwithstanding that, it also believes that robust efforts should be made to secure funds from those institutions that were involved in the abuse. It is only right that they should share the costs with the public sector. Officials advised the Committee during the briefings that there has been contact with the institutions on a number of occasions but that it is expected that Ministers will now become involved. This is an area that the Committee will follow closely.

Members heard that the Department's key objectives will be to address its statutory obligations; meet any contractual obligations; take forward the Programme for Government commitments; protect the victims and survivors' service budget; mitigate the impact of services delivered through arm's-length bodies (ALBs); and protect programme spend. The Department is managing a resource funding deficit of nearly £3 million. That is a result of budget cuts over the past five years and some new and additional work that the Department has taken forward for which baseline funding has not yet been received. The funding situation has been made even more difficult because of the work on implementing the HIA inquiry legislation, which I alluded to, and the victims' payments, which I will talk a bit more about. To cover the payments to victims of Troubles-related incidents, the Department has

estimated costs of £25 million to £60 million for the coming year and, over a three-year budget period, costs of £109 million. Reflecting on the experience of the PSNI hearing-loss claims, the Committee questioned officials about the estimates. While acknowledging the difficulties around estimating costs, there was a sense that those estimates should be treated with caution and, indeed, viewed as conservative. There is absolutely no question in the mind of the Committee that additional resource to fund victims' payments should come into the block grant. Westminster designed the scheme, Westminster put it in law, so Westminster should foot the bill.

The Committee puts down a marker at this stage about the need to properly fund work to strengthen international relations. Given the UK's exit from the European Union, it is more important now than ever that the North's voice is heard loud and clear on the world stage. The importance of strong international relations in marketing and promoting our region as an attractive investment and tourist opportunity and in creating economic, technological and cultural partnerships cannot be overstated.

I will now move to capital funding. Officials confirmed that there is a £7.5 million pressure for Urban Villages. To spread the positive outcome of the Urban Villages programme to a wider geographical base, the Department is requesting additional resources to support the establishment of more Urban Villages areas. If agreed, that will also require additional resource funding in 2020-21 to develop appropriate projects and start the delivery of revenue projects, with the aim of commencing the delivery of capital investments in 2021-22. For Ebrington, there is a degree of uncertainty about when the site will be transferred to Derry City and Strabane District Council. However, the Department is working on the basis that it will complete the required capital works on the site by 2021-22, so the capital requirement includes £2.3 million to develop infrastructure and for external repairs. Some £760,000 has been identified as being needed for essential or legislative health and safety works at the Maze/Long Kesh site, although it should be noted that the capital requirement will increase significantly if agreement is reached on the way forward with the site.

A number of funds will be held centrally for allocation in-year to ensure key Executive commitments are funded and delivered, and we will be keeping an eye on those programmes. They include £7.8 of capital and £2.5 million of resource for Delivering Social Change, which is a key programme that we want to see delivered, and the social investment fund.

Officials have advised that resource amounts close to £6.35 million are required for the commitments that arise from NDNA. That money will cover costs associated with the Office for Identity and Cultural Expression, an Irish-language commissioner, an Ulster-Scots/Ulster-British commissioner, a commissioner for ministerial standards, a compact civic advisory panel and bill of rights experts. The overall figure is set to rise to just under £12 million in 2021-22, before reducing the year after.

The Department has a significant number of budget lines that it needs to keep an eye on. We have received only the initial briefings, and it is our intention to receive more briefings. We wish to see the appropriate funding set aside for any of the commitments that have been made so that all the initiatives can be delivered.

Mr Lyttle (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): The absence of an Executive and Assembly Committees has made monitoring in-year allocations and savings delivery plans and determining how effectively the Department of Education is using its £2 billion budget almost impossible for 2019-2020. That is an unacceptable democratic deficit and an inadequate budgetary process under any circumstances, but particularly so during a time of a financial crisis in public services. Despite that, the restored Education Committee has worked diligently in recent weeks to examine the financial information provided by the Department of Education for 2019-2020 and beyond.

The Department of Education received nearly £90 million of monitoring round allocations in 2019-2020. Despite that, the Department expects to overspend on its budget for 2019-2020 by around £28 million. There are two key contributors, it seems, to that financial crisis: an Education Authority (EA) overspend; and particularly acute demands on our special educational needs (SEN) provision. Special schools, for example, have seen their numbers increase by a staggering 20% in about five years. The Education Committee recently learned how that and the increasing complexity of pupil need is presenting significant challenges to special educational needs provision. The demand for SEN support in mainstream schools for non-statemented and statemented pupils has also increased significantly, and the system is failing to respond adequately. The Education Committee is agreed that responding to that crisis will require not only the significant investment requested but radical reform.

Some of the other key challenges include our school budgets. A significant number of our schools are in deficit. One contributing factor to the situation is the HM Treasury requirement in recent years on teachers' employers to increase their pension and National Insurance contributions. Between 80% and 90% of school spending goes on salaries, and that has had a significant impact, forcing many stable and growing schools into financial deficit. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) has indicated that we have more schools in deficit and that we have a system that is at tipping point financially.

Teachers' pay and conditions require urgent investment to deliver the fair outcomes that our teachers need. We may also see a potentially significant increase in rates bills for many schools across Northern Ireland. The figure is imagined to be approximately £11 million. Add to that investment needed for childcare, nurture, tackling underachievement and emotional health and well-being, and those costs are projected to be £50 million to £60 million.

During our deliberations on the Supply vote, the Committee also took evidence from BookTrust Northern Ireland on its early intervention programmes. The Committee felt strongly that this kind of low-cost intervention merited support. Members had no hesitation in supporting the BookTrust's bid for the very reasonable sum of £50,000. I am glad to make this known to the Assembly, and I hope that other Members may also refer their support to the BookTrust early intervention reading programme in Northern Ireland.

To address the multi-million-pound pressures on education, radical reform is absolutely vital. In addition to the ongoing education transformation programme, the Committee looks forward to urgent implementation of the review of education proposed in the 'New Decade, New

Approach' document. If we are to avoid a cycle of deficit followed by bailout followed by deficit, a new, radical approach is absolutely required.

The Department of Education has a capital budget of around £167 million for 2019. The Committee's current expectation is that the Department will continue a good record of having capital money spent before the year-end. However, there are significant challenges, particularly in relation to the Strule shared education project, which is now tens of millions of pounds over budget and several years late. The Fresh Start capital programme has also seen only around £29 million spent to date, with around £470 million to be spent in a relatively short period of five years. Fresh Start will fund a substantial new-build programme, from which six shared education projects and 17 integrated schools will benefit, but this does appear to be dependent on HM Treasury agreement to re-profile Fresh Start expenditure over the coming years.

I would also like to point out that the Department's completion rates for school enhancement programmes are good and running at around 90%. Members will also no doubt wish to refer to the minor works expenditure being extremely welcome across a number of schools and the budget for that needing significant increase. Notwithstanding the above, there is still concern with regard to business case development and approval for new school bids and the speed at which that is delivered. To be clear, over half of the new school builds announced in the period 2012-16 have yet to have construction started, and the problems appear to relate to both planning and area planning and continue to be a concern to the Education Committee.

I would like to say a few words as an Alliance MLA. The previous Education Authority CEO stated clearly over two years ago that without radical investment and radical reform our education system would be unaffordable, socially immobile and unfit for the 21st century — a stark warning. Two years later, the Education Department faces pressures of up to £427 million, rising closer to £1 billion in three years, a £400 million backlog in maintenance and a £150 million gap to deliver the basic standards of fair teacher pay and conditions to end the industrial action that is damaging the well-being of our workforce across our schools in Northern Ireland and limiting the ability of our schools to deliver.

We also know that the cost of division in Northern Ireland with regard to education is estimated to be up to £100 million a year, yet area planning and the rationalisation of our education system are moving at snail's pace. As with health, investment alone will not resolve this financial crisis in education, and an independent review of education must be an urgent priority for the Education Minister to set out the radical reform that we need to deliver a more integrated, affordable, socially mobile and fit-for-purpose 21st century system. Most importantly, we must deliver quality education opportunities and outcomes for all children and young people in Northern Ireland.

1.00 pm

Ms P Bradley (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities): I welcome the opportunity to make some remarks as Committee Chairperson. The spring Supplementary Estimates show significant increases in departmental net resource requirement of almost £288

million and an increase in the net cash requirement of almost £202 million. That estimate reflects changes to the budget position for 2019-2020 in monitoring rounds and annually managed expenditure forecasts (AME).

The Department has advised the Committee that the main reasons for the differences between the Main Estimates and the spring Supplementary Estimates are due to increases in demand-led benefits and provisions for annually managed expenditure. The Committee noted that there is a significant increase in AME of £116 million relating to the necessity to increase funding to the financial assistance scheme in order to protect the pensions of people whose employer has become insolvent; or where the pension scheme could not afford the benefits promised to members upon winding up; or where the pension scheme started to wind up between 1 January 1997 and 5 April 2005.

The Committee recognises that that is a precautionary step, given that the actual amount required rests on a judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union that has yet to be delivered. This is an estimate of potential future requirements and the reason why the net cash requirement is lower than the net resource requirement. However, it may, in fact, ultimately result in an underspend if pension members are not required to receive 100% protection.

That increase in AME was partially offset by reduced requirements that the Department gave up in the September 2019 and January 2020 monitoring rounds. The Department surrendered £38.8 million of DEL resource and £36.4 million of DEL capital. While the Committee never likes to see resources surrendered, the vast majority of the reduced requirements in DEL capital is due to the need to surrender financial transactions capital (FTC) of £36.2 million. That is due to the current Office of National Statistics (ONS) classification of housing associations. While there is an ongoing derogation from Treasury, the rules still will not allow us to use FTC to build social housing until the reclassification of registered housing associations is dealt with on a legislative basis in the Assembly. The Committee acknowledges that that issue is a key priority for the Minister, and we hope that it can be resolved in the very near future.

The majority of reduced resource requirements relate to Fresh Start mitigation measures not being required due to successful PIP appeals and a lower uptake in discretionary support grants. The Committee was also informed that some welfare reform protections were not taken forward and PIP contract volumes were less than expected.

The Committee notes that less funding was also required for the rates rebate programme, a reduced requirement of around £8.7 million. That issue was raised at last week's Committee meeting and members made the point that often those people who could benefit from this programme are not aware of it. The Committee has praised the Make the Call programme and we would like to see the Department put a similar effort into raising awareness about the rates rebate programme.

The issue of departmental budgets has rarely been out of the news of late, and everything seems to be a priority. We all have a duty to ensure ongoing public service delivery, but, in doing so, we collectively will have to make some unpopular decisions. The Committee looks forward to engaging with the Minister and our stakeholders to ensure

that she receives the advice and support required to make those decisions.

Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I welcome the opportunity to outline the views of the Committee. The Committee received an oral briefing from the Department on the spring Supplementary Estimates and the budget 2019-2020 and proposals for 2020-21 on 13 February.

Officials advised the Committee that the budget for 2019-2020 had an allocation of £312.4 million, alongside £13.9 million for Brexit, for staff salaries, which was additional money. That additional money for staff to work on Brexit was initially to help with preparations for a possible EU exit with no deal. There is a separate bid for Brexit staff in the 2020-21 budget proposal. Therefore, in the budget, we are already seeing clear signs that Brexit preparations are and will be a priority for the Department.

Members queried the number of staff allocated to deal with Brexit and the proposal to increase staff costs to £23.6 million in the 2020-21 budget. Officials advised that, due to the number of specialist posts required and the unavailability of staff in the Department to fill those posts, they have secured, externally, a process that is ongoing. The Department advised the Committee that it considers a staff complement of 454 to be a more accurate figure for the number of staff that it will require to deliver Brexit successfully.

Salaries and wages still accounts for the biggest cost in the Department at £125 million. After that, only some £46.6 million is allocated to programmes, of which £34.5 million is funding for the three NDPBs: the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), the Loughs Agency and the Livestock and Meat Commission. In terms of programme funding for 2019-2020, the Committee heard that, of the £46.6 million of expenditure, the single largest programme was the £18.9 million spent on compensation for TB. A further £8.8 million was spent on the fees for private vets testing for TB, and a considerable sum is spent on TB testing by in-house vets.

The Department advised that the January monitoring round had concluded with reduced requirements, including £12 million of resource, £1.6 million of resource depreciation impairment and £4 million in capital. The Committee sought clarification on the surrender of the £12 million resource, which it considered to be a large amount. Officials advised that it was a mix of money from no-deal preparations of £2.9 million, reduced requirements for TB compensation of £2.6 million, and a number of one-off easements. The Department had also generated additional income over and above what had been forecast. That came from Forest Service — £0.9 million — and the regulatory aspect of the NI Environment Agency.

On the resource and capital budgets, the Department advised the Committee that the spring Supplementary Estimates provides for a total net resource of £330.2 million and a net cash requirement of £300.2 million. Members noted that the biggest NDPB is AFBI. It has the largest budget totalling £32.4 million. One of the Committee's members expressed concern about the issue of royalty income to AFBI and focused on how collection of that had been problematic. The Committee recognised that that is now subject to legal proceedings, and we await with interest to see how that unfolds.

The Committee recognises the impact that Brexit will have on the Department's budget in terms of replacement funding and was keen to find out how the Department will manage that, particularly in relation to CAP funding, which is currently worth £293 million. The Committee was pleased to hear that that has been secured, for this year, from British Treasury funding, but we are concerned about what may happen after this time. Such EU replacement funding will come directly from the Treasury, and there are big questions over how much we will get as a percentage share and whether it will be ring-fenced. There are further questions on the UK prosperity fund and its role in the replacement of rural development funding. Indeed, that point was raised at the Committee meeting on Thursday, when we heard evidence from representatives from the LAGs: Rural Action, Rural Women's Network and Rural Community Network (RCN). Looking forward to the Budget 2020-21, the Committee heard that the Department will bid for EU replacement funding within its resource bids, which total £310.6 million.

Other areas that Committee members are concerned with include elements in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. The Committee was encouraged to hear that climate change features and noted the bid of £2 million for additional staff to take forward new legislation, policies and strategies. That also includes the scoping study for the creation of an independent environmental protection agency. There is considerable interest in those policy matters. The Committee looks forward to engaging further with the Department on the policy progress and final allocations in the 2020-2021 Budget. The funding bid for climate change also covers a bid for a LIDAR survey of our coastline.

One major area of concern for the Committee is the replacement of the animal and public health information service (APHIS). Many Members will know that that system allows farmers to register cattle movements and other matters. It is a vital component in ensuring compliance with animal health and traceability matters, and it is of great importance in our international trade of agri-food, particularly at this time. In 2016, the Department commenced a project to introduce a new system known as NIFAIS — the NI food animal information system — with an expected completion date of 2018.

Due to issues with the contractor, including a high level of defects with the software, it has missed the deadline and has to date cost £10.9 million. The Committee noted that a further £2.3 million has been requested in the Department's capital bids for the 2020-21 budget, and we will watch with interest how that unfolds. We have asked for further information and expect to be kept up to date by the Department as time allows.

The Committee is also interested in the Department's funding allocation to Project Stratum and rural broadband. Many rural areas and districts have appalling connectivity issues. In this day and age, that is not acceptable, especially as we encourage farmers to move online to fill in their forms and for the use of APHIS. This is important right across the rural spectrum, for SMEs, wider connectivity, education and even for reducing social isolation, which is a key factor in mental ill health.

The Committee raised the issue of the budget allocated to remedial action at Mobuoy, of which most Members are aware. The Committee will keep an eye on that matter.

The Committee values the opportunity to scrutinise the Department's planned expenditure and delivery of associated projects. I am optimistic that the Department will continue to update the Committee on all aspects of budgetary information to assist us in undertaking that function. I conclude my remarks as Cathaoirleach of the AERA Committee.

I want to raise a couple of points as spokesperson for agriculture and rural affairs for my party. Last Thursday, we had a marathon session of the AERA Committee and took evidence on the Agriculture Bill. Brexit is a toxic issue that permeates absolutely everything. That is compounded by the announcement last week by the British Home Office of the points-based immigration system.

We have information from the 2017 DAERA migrant labour survey and from DAERA's migrant labour and trade inquiry the same year. We found that 10,000 new nationals are employed in the agri-food industry in the North and another 1,400 are so-called seasonal migrant workers. Horticulture will be particularly impacted should this points-based system come in.

We heard compelling evidence from the Meat Exporters' Association, which made the point that 60% of employees in the meat industry are new nationals from outside Ireland, and it would be devastating to place barriers in their way. It was said very pointedly that the Tory Government talk about different types of labour — skilled and low-skilled — but it was made clear that we need labour here. The meat industry brings in workers and trains them; those workers learn the local language and make a big contribution to the economy and society. However, that is completely ignored by the British Home Office in its plan to introduce a points-based system to the North. We have the Irish protocol, which guarantees unfettered trade across the island, which is so important for the likes of dairy processing. However, the points-based immigration system has the potential to place a hard border on labour, which is totally unacceptable. Obviously, it may happen that capital will follow labour, and that will have a huge impact not only on those people but on the wider economy and industry.

Brexit is a huge issue. I will pick up on it again tomorrow when the Budget is debated. Brexit permeates the whole debate around the agri-food industry as we try to map out a future policy for agri-food in the North.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, for your indulgence.

Mr McCrossan (The Chairperson of the Audit Committee): At the Audit Committee's first meeting on 13 February, it took evidence from Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) officials, including the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), and officials from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), including the acting ombudsman. The Committee has not yet had an opportunity to take evidence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. My comments, therefore, will cover only issues about the Audit Office and the Public Services Ombudsman.

During the briefing on 13 February, members had an opportunity to question officials from both organisations about changes to their budget position for 2019-2020. First, the NIPSO had a £756,000 reduction in its net provision from Main Estimates to Supplementary

Estimates. That was due to a combination of two main factors, plus a number of miscellaneous cash flow adjustments. The main factors were, first, a reduced requirement of £248,000 declared in the January monitoring round in respect of maladministration complaints handling and, secondly, a transfer of unspent moneys, amounting to £250,000, to the Department for Communities in respect of NIPSO's local government ethical standards function. A cash flow adjustment of £250,000 related to the technical treatment of the landlord contribution to refurbishment work in NIPSO's office. During last week's evidence session with NIPSO officials, I questioned them further on the detail of the reduced requirements from 2019-2020. Officials explained that the reduced requirement from the January monitoring round related to moneys allocated, not all of which could be spent effectively in-year due to the non-recurrent nature and mid-year timing of receipt.

1.15 pm

The other reduced requirement related to, as I mentioned, NIPSO's local government ethical standards function. That has arisen primarily from the suspension of adjudication activity owing to the post of commissioner being vacant since July 2019. As Members may be aware, the Ombudsman also holds the role of Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner for Standards, which includes the function of investigating complaints of alleged breaches of the local government code of conduct. Although investigations into alleged breaches of that code have gone ahead in the absence of a commissioner, there has been an enforced pause of the adjudication aspect of the role as it could not be delegated to the deputy ombudsman. Additional funding for that function could not be spent as adjudications could not be taken forward.

Given that and other implications of the commissioner vacancy, the Audit Committee wrote to the Assembly Commission asking for a recruitment timetable. The Committee, in its evidence session with the Audit Office officials and C&AG, noted that, as a result of the changes to the NIAO budget position in 2019-2020, there was a resource saving of £981,000. Officials explained that this was due to the continuing significant reduction in staff costs following staff leaving through the voluntary exit scheme and natural wastage over recent years.

The Committee has sought further information on the Audit Office's contribution to in-year monitoring. The Committee noted that further recruitment will be required over the next two years to ensure that the Audit Office is adequately staffed to meet its strategic objectives going forward, including staff resources to address the needs of the Assembly.

The Audit Office also had a reduced capital requirement of £290,000 due to adjustments to the timetable associated with the refurbishment project and costs associated with the procurement of a design team. At the meeting last week, Committee members probed the NIAO officials on the financial implications of the Audit Office's refurbishment project, given the anticipated increased costs to the capital budget. In the case of the Audit Office, members were assured that appropriate use is being made of NICS shared services. Similarly, we have asked the Public Services Ombudsman to what extent it makes use of those services. The Audit Office also makes use

of the Strategic Investment Board and construction and procurement delivery to assist in its accommodation project in order to ensure that the necessary expertise is utilised in such a key project for the organisation's future.

The Audit Committee has sought assurances from the NIAO and NIPSO and, in due course, will do likewise with the Assembly Commission to ensure that, once that meeting takes place, effective financial management processes are in place to avoid overspend and minimise underspend going forward. The Committee looks forward to fulfilling its important statutory function.

I will now address the debate as the SDLP's spokesperson for education and as the MLA for West Tyrone. As Members have clearly articulated, our public services are crumbling. They are falling apart. They are on their knees and, in many areas, on life support. The pressures facing health, education, housing and our welfare system reached crisis point long ago. We in the Chamber must offer more. We must deliver on the mandate that we have been given, and we must ensure that our public sector delivers effectively and efficiently for anyone who needs it.

In education, our teachers, as already mentioned, schools and children are being failed. We have had a perfect storm bubbling for the past 10 years due to inadequate funding and real-term cuts that were worsened by the absence of these institutions for three very long and challenging years — a time when teachers and principals had to struggle along without any proper funding support for their schools.

It is deeply concerning that over £400 million is needed to tackle immediate pressures in the education system. That figure was provided to the Committee by the Education Minister the week before last. While demand and costs have increased, our education budget has flatlined. Our schools cannot continue to, or be expected to, deliver increasingly better results against what are decreasing real-term budget cuts.

Teachers have also been left out in the cold in terms of receiving a fair pay increase for the work that they do. That is an unforgivable situation given that, when you look at teacher pay in Wales, England and Scotland, you see that teachers here receive way below what they should be receiving. They deserve a pay increase, and I would like the Minister to ensure that that happens as swiftly as possible. We should not be in this situation. It is important for the Chamber to understand that teachers not only do their own job but almost act as parents to many pupils in their role as a role model. They are almost like nurses and doctors in the classroom. They are like counsellors to the young people who need the necessary support, and they ensure that children receive a proper meal in the day. It is teachers who identify those serious issues.

Teachers in schools are also struggling to deal with special educational needs, with massive investment needed to ensure that vulnerable children receive the proper support and care that they need. Although I welcome the Minister's additional £10 million investment in special educational needs services, there is a long way to go to ensure that no child with special educational needs loses out, but we are at a starting point at last. There is greater demand, but that demand has not been met with greater resources in recent years. I hope that the Minister, who is back in place, leaves no stone unturned to ensure that those services are properly and adequately financed.

There are also funding pressures surrounding mental health services in our schools and pressures in tackling a range of issues surrounding deprivation and its impact on our children's education. It is absolutely shocking that, since 2017, there have been 25 critical instances where schools have been impacted by suicide. That is the number that has been documented. That has far-reaching consequences for the school, for the community but, in particular, for the other pupils. We need to have a fundamental look at how we fund mental health services in our schools, as we continue to face a suicide pandemic across the North. In West Tyrone, we are no strangers to that. I have sat at the funeral of many young people who have taken their life, and I have seen the ripple effect and consequences of that across the entire school and the community that is there to support the family and grieve for that loss. We have not seen proper investment in mental health services, with many people forced to attend hospitals due to the lack of services in our communities. We see that in particular places, and I will talk about Strabane, where an out-of-hours GP service does not exist. People are forced in difficult situations to attend the A&E at Altnagelvin Hospital, which is already under huge pressure.

We have also seen very little done to tackle deprivation and poverty, which are crushing families locally. Many children never realise their dreams and ambitions or utilise their full potential. I know that more and more families are struggling. Benefits cuts have forced people into poverty. In my constituency, families have been forced to use food banks. Is that the society that the House wants to see, or are we going to do something about it?

West Tyrone has also long suffered from an infrastructure deficit, and I am well on record in talking about the A5 and the huge issue that it presents to the health and safety of my constituents and those travelling across my constituency. The A5 needs to be delivered. It has been an issue for a long number of years, and people's lives have been lost as a consequence of the dangerous road that is there.

The House, with proper leadership and political will, can deliver on the many issues that we face, but our children, who are the children of today, should not be the generation that loses out because of a political failure of the House. We have a responsibility to those children and to the people whom we represent to deliver more for all who support those children and for our teachers.

Mr Stalford: It is a pleasure to follow the Member from West Tyrone. I believe that public-service reform will be the defining issue of the next 10 years. It is incumbent upon all Members to have the courage to do what needs to be done. Whether it is in health, in education or in any of our other public services, we need to be brave and to accept that controversial and sometimes unpopular decisions will need to be made.

I welcome the fact that this process is now back in local hands. The scrutiny of departmental monitoring rounds and of Budgets etc should never have been out of the hands of these institutions. Devolution is about setting local priorities. It is about having power in local hands, in order to deliver for local communities. The Finance Minister's approach — to wait until after the national Budget is handed down at Westminster in order to allow us a more accurate picture, whereby we can set priorities for the coming period — is absolutely correct.

When we are talking in the context of the Budget at Westminster and its implications for us, it is important to note that the previous Secretary of State, Julian Smith, presided over a talks process that produced an agreement that contained spending commitments. Those were commitments given by the Government at Westminster, and it is essential that Julian Smith's successor, Brandon Lewis, honour the commitments that were given.

I will now go over areas in Departments that are of particular interest to me as an individual. I have some concerns about reductions in net provision for urban regeneration, sports, and employability and skills for the Department for Communities. As a representative of communities such as Sandy Row, Donegall Pass, the bottom of Ravenhill Road and the Market, I know about the need for investment in urban regeneration in those inner-city communities.

I welcome the fact that there has been a reduction in the costs associated with the Department of Education's overheads, but we need to press on with the devolution of powers to schools and, in particular, to head teachers, so that they can have greater control over their own budgets. I welcome the allocation that has been made for special educational needs. We are in the middle of a massive explosion in diagnoses of autism and ADHD, and it is important that every child gets the best start in life, particularly children with special educational needs. I welcome the announcement in that regard.

The problems in the Department for Infrastructure have already been mentioned by Miss McIlveen, the Chairperson of the Infrastructure Committee. The reductions that we have seen in road safety provision and for roads maintenance will have a knock-on effect. For the Department of Justice, I am concerned about the reduction in funding for the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust, but I welcome the increase in additional resources for the PSNI. The police work hard to keep us all safe, and a well-funded police service is essential.

I associate myself with the remarks made by Mr McGrath, the Chairperson of the Executive Office Committee, on which I serve, on the issue of historical institutional abuse. The estimate that has been given is that the recompense scheme is going to cost anywhere between £25 million and £60 million per annum. It is essential, and it is only right, that the institutions that had a hand in the systematic abuse of children should be made to pay financially towards that compensation scheme. The state handed children over to rapists and paedophiles, and it is essential that those institutions, which those rapists and paedophiles used as a cloak to carry out their despicable actions, be made to pay towards compensating their victims. I therefore associate myself with what the Chairperson of the Committee said. I welcome the increase in funding for the Victims and Survivors Service, because I think that we have a moral obligation in that area.

I turn now to the Department of Health. The comments made by the Chairperson of the Health Committee are astonishing. The statistic that he mentioned is staggering: more than 50% of our block grant allocation is going to a single Department. If that does not demonstrate the need for serious and far-reaching reform, I do not know what does.

Courage is needed around the Chamber to see that issue through. It would be the easiest thing in the world for the

Health Minister, as previous Health Ministers have done, to simply stamp his feet and say, "I need more money", and it would be the easiest thing in the world for the Finance Minister to say, "You can't have more money. You need to do the reform". One side will make their point, the other side will make theirs, and, at the end of it, nothing will have got better. Nothing will have improved. I am happy to put it on record and have it recorded in Hansard that I believe that Robin Swann should be given the political cover to see through essential health reform, because, if we continue like this, within a short time, that one Department will gobble up not 50% of the block grant but 100% of it. We need to be prepared to do the difficult things that need to be done there.

I will conclude where I began. The Secretary of State and the Government have obligations towards all of us who entered into the New Decade, New Approach agreement. The Secretary of State may have changed, but the commitments that were made have not. We all have a job now to do to hold Her Majesty's Government to those commitments.

1.30 pm

Mr Nesbitt: It is a pleasure to follow the Member for South Belfast, although, to pick up on his last point and to put it on record, not all parties that are now in the Executive bought into every commitment of the New Decade, New Approach deal.

Let us look at the pressures coming to the Executive Office's budget. The Committee was given a briefing last week, and we were told that there were pressures for this financial year and, indeed, that the baseline's pressures were explained by a combination of budget cuts in each of the past five years: 12.8% in the 2015-16 financial year; 5.7% in 2016-17; 4% in 2017-18 and 2018-19; and 3.6% in 2019-2020. If we are to be accurate, open and transparent in our government, we have to acknowledge that that does not tell the whole story. When the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) became the Executive Office, functions were transferred to other Departments, and with those functions went the budgets. Inevitably, there was a decrease in the Executive Office's budget, but it was not a pressure, because they no longer had to deliver the services that had been transferred. I want to put it on record that I think that the officials of the Executive Office could have made that point and they could be accused of trying to spin by saying that it was all pressure because the budget was reduced.

Looking at the past year and the narrative that is attached within the spring Supplementary Estimates booklet, I see that the first thing to be mentioned is the North/South Ministerial Council. Over the past three years, it was not just this Chamber that was not sitting; there was no political meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, yet it still cost nearly £1.5 million in this financial year — £1,434,000. Is that not a bit like buying an expensive car that you cannot afford, taxing it, insuring it and leaving it in the driveway with the engine idling, topping it up every now and then with petrol or diesel at £1.25 a litre? We simply cannot say that there was value for money in that expenditure or, indeed, for the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, because nothing has happened in this financial year beyond the RUAS and the Balmoral show. Yet it has cost us over £1.5 million — £1.688 million, to be exact. Is it not the case that the failure to move on

from the fact that the peace-building and conflict resolution centre is not to be built on that site — by the way, the development corporation has moved on from that; its business plan no longer has the peace-building centre — not just another sign of our shocking failure to deliver on big-ticket projects? Desertcreat never happened for the blue-light services. The A5, as the honourable Member pointed out earlier, has yet to be completed as intended.

I note that, in the last year, money was spent on the Executive's good relations strategy, called Together: Building a United Community. Now, T:BUC has seven headline objectives, and, under scrutiny last week, Executive Office officials made it clear that two were in danger and would come up as red in a red/amber/green (RAG) analysis. One of those objectives is removing peace walls. T:BUC said that we would remove every peace wall by 2023. It is already clear that that will not happen. We must be aware that that will have implications for future budgets. We have to consult, and removing a peace wall does not come at a negligible cost.

Talking of implications for future budgets, what about the social investment fund? Again, for the record, the Executive agreed the social investment fund on 22 March 2011. There would be £80 million to tackle deprivation and dereliction. It was a four-year programme that should have ended in 2016. We now know that it will not end until 2023. We are being asked to Vote on Account roughly 45% of next year's budget, and we know that, in next year's budget, the Executive Office has capital DEL for SIF projects of £7 million — actually £7.8 million, I think. That is a stress on our budgets. That money will not be spent for our citizens in the way that we might like because we have spectacularly failed to deliver the social investment fund as intended, i.e. £80 million over four years starting in 2011.

I note also that money has been spent on the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition. I believe that the total cost to date is some £0.75 million and that individual members earn £300 per day by sitting on a body that is yet to report or make a recommendation. Can we afford to go on with that, particularly as we have now determined, through the New Decade, New Approach deal, that we will have an alternative body — an office of identity — with two commissioners? It appears that we have set aside some £5 million for that new office with its commissioners — £5.833 million next year, which, perhaps, this Vote on Account will help kick-start — in fact, over the next three years, the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression with the two associated commissioners is scheduled to spend £28.25 million. When the Executive Office officials were asked what that would be spent on, they were unable to say, because Ministers have yet to decide on a work programme or aims and objectives for that office and the two commissioners. Can the Minister of Finance really tolerate budgets being allocated with no business plan, no vision, no aims and no objectives? That £28.25 million over three years is a lot of money: Robin Swann could use it in Health; Peter Weir could use it in Education; Nichola Mallon could use it in Infrastructure.

A final thought is with regard to AME, annually managed expenditure. That is the money that is not part of the block grant; it is the money that pays for welfare benefits, pensions and student loans. It is by far the lion's share of what we are talking about in these Estimates, as AME will flow through the Executive Office to the tune of around

£540 million this year. AME is, of course, the money that the public learnt about during the inquiry into the renewable heat incentive scandal. We learnt that there were those in this Building, in Stormont Castle and in our Administration who said that, because it was not part of the block grant, it was free money and the attitude should be, "Fill your boots". I suspect that there is more than one copy of Sam McBride's 'Burned' floating around Her Majesty's Treasury these days. I am sure that eyebrows have been raised at the attitude that you can fill your boots because it is not part of the block grant and, therefore, it is free dosh and you can take what you want. With the rise of English nationalism, we should be very aware of the damage that that has done to our position in the United Kingdom.

I know that the Minister will head to the Treasury this week, looking to cut a deal. I wish him well with that, because we need it for the people of Northern Ireland. As a corporate body, we really need to move away from where we are, which is a perception that we have a dependency culture and we just put our hand out for more and more, again and again. Let us switch that to a prosperity agenda, and let us ask the Treasury for the tools to strengthen our economy and to concentrate on the welfare and prosperity of our people.

Mr Newton: I will speak on the spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 as a member of the Education Committee. I note that what we are required to do is to Vote on Account and provide finance to allow existing services to continue in the early months of 2020-21, pending consideration of appropriate legislation to provide the funds. That is what we are debating today.

I agree with much of what the Chair of the Committee said and, indeed, much of what Mr Daniel McCrossan said. There appears to be a fairly cohesive approach by the Committee on what is the most important feature for our future well-being in the sense that we start to think about education not as a cost to the Minister but as an investment by the Minister in the future of the children and young people of Northern Ireland. We are now looking at every aspect of life in Northern Ireland through the New Decade, New Approach agreement that was reached by the five main parties.

When the Department officials came last week to speak to the Committee, that was after the Minister had been there the week before. The Minister made his case and indicated to the Committee members what, he thought, was required to make sure that we have an education system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of young people and for the focus on meeting their needs. The Minister addressed the Committee on his perceptions and thoughts and the approach that he would use. He indicated that he would require between £300 million and £400 million, and, indeed, the Department has confirmed that it is a figure in that region.

I pay tribute to the Department of Education officials for how they approached the situation and for how they conducted themselves and performed during the time when we were not performing in the Assembly.

They have been diligent in presenting their papers to the Committee, and their clarity of thinking and prioritisation of issues are to be admired. They have displayed those skills in a very difficult situation for officials, when no Minister was available. Their task was to create a successful educational environment, but it was short of finance.

1.45 pm

We will maybe get the opportunity to spend a bit more time on each of the areas tomorrow, but, in making that bid for £354 million, I do not think that anyone in the Chamber would disagree — at least, I hope that they would not disagree — that we need to spend money on some areas. I will mention a few of those areas. I think that we would all agree that the teachers' industrial dispute has to be solved and that, in recompense to them, their standard of payment is made comparable to those in other parts of the UK. The Department has included a total of £148 million for the estimated 2020-21 pressures to address the teaching and non-teaching pay disputes. Of that, it is estimated, circa £68 million is required to implement the current proposed deal for teachers, which covers the 2017-18 period. I do not think that anyone would not be supportive of teachers being sufficiently rewarded.

I will also mention briefly another area that has a great deal of sympathy and empathy: teachers who provide a service to children with special educational needs. The Committee had the privilege of meeting, in an informal way, a leadership group from special educational needs teachers. We did so to try to understand the pressures that they are and will be under, as was referred to earlier, with a growing number of pupils with special educational needs needing to receive an appropriate education. We should, perhaps, think not just of the teaching aspect of that but of where those teachers are required to provide a care aspect, even to the extent of spending time on pupils' medical needs. The Department indicated that it is estimated that another £30 million will be needed annually to cover the implementation of the new SEN framework. I do not think that there would be any disagreement — I hope that there would not be — across the Chamber or the Departments in addressing those needs.

Mr Speaker, you will be aware that we have debated another area of education, which is referred to as "educational underachievement"; I wish that we could get away from using the term "underachievement" and, perhaps, look at that aspect of education in a more positive way. There is probably much more of a need in areas where there are young Protestant boys or males who have not, perhaps, embraced education in the way that many other parts of the community have. We are looking at addressing the links between persistent educational underachievement and the socio-economic background that, perhaps, creates that. The Department is looking for an additional £10 million for that in 2020-21, increasing to £30 million annually.

Under New Decade, New Approach, we all need to think that we are investing in our children and young people. This is not a cost. However, if it is perceived to be a cost, the failure to meet it and the future ramifications of not meeting it, will be borne by every other Department. The Department has already identified an estimated cost of £426 million. I hope that, when the Minister comes to make the allocations, we will see that education is one of the mainstays of his Budget.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Philip McGuigan.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Economy

Mineral Prospecting

1. **Miss Woods** asked the Minister for the Economy for her assessment of trends in local mineral prospecting. (AQO 163/17-22)

Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy): Northern Ireland currently has 12 active mineral-prospecting licences: 10 for base metals, mainly zinc, copper, lead, iron, cobalt and baryte; one for diamonds; and one for rock salt. In 2009, following the publication of data from a major geological survey, the Tellus project, the number of licences peaked at 42. Those 42 licences covered 73% of the land mass of Northern Ireland, compared with around 16.6% today. After that 2009 peak, subsequent years saw a steady decline in the number of licences until 2014, when numbers stabilised, and they have remained relatively consistent — between 10 and 20 — ever since.

It is difficult to consider mineral-prospecting licences in Northern Ireland without the question of gold exploration also being raised. As a reserved matter, consent to explore for gold and silver is given by the Crown Estate and does not require a mineral-prospecting licence from my Department. However, of the 12 licences currently in place from my Department, nine also have options from the Crown Estate to explore for gold and silver.

Miss Woods: Minister, you will be aware of local community-based campaigns against the exploitation and pollution of our countryside by international corporations. Northern Ireland has a major problem with unregulated mines and quarries and the unrecorded impact that they have on the environment. According to the latest annual mineral statement, published in 2018, a total of 157 quarries were contacted but only 115 responses received. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that all information is collected as required under schedule 13 to the Mineral Development Act (Northern Ireland) 1969?

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Member for her statement and question. It is an interesting area for my Department and perhaps demonstrates to everyone here the broad range of issues that the Department for the Economy covers. Northern Ireland minerals and petroleum-licensing legislation is now over 50 years old. The legislation needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is flexible, to balance the needs of our society and our environmental responsibilities with the economic benefit. We all recognise the concerns about the environmental and community impacts of mineral and petroleum licensing. On 3 February this year, the Assembly declared a climate emergency and called on the Executive to fulfil the climate action and environmental agreements in 'New Decade, New Approach'.

Equally, my Department recognises that access to mineral resources is important, particularly to support the new green technologies that will be required to help us

tackle climate change. Towards the end of last year, my Department began a strategic review of licensing policy, and I fully intend for that work to continue. To inform the review, I recently gave approval for my Department to commission independent research in the area. The aim of the research is to develop our understanding of the potential economic, environmental and societal impacts of mineral and petroleum activities and to consider what policy and licensing regime we require for the future. I look forward to having that conversation with the Committee and in the Chamber.

Ms Sheerin: It is important that there is caution around the prospecting and mining of precious minerals, particularly in areas where it is not supported by the community, and it is crucial that, in issuing licences for resource extraction, we prevent any further fossil fuels being extracted. Does the Minister have plans to end the issuing of licences for petroleum exploration?

Mrs Dodds: Currently, we have two petroleum licensing applications. Both of those consultations opened on 7 May 2019 and closed on 31 July 2019. Members will be aware from their local communities that there were huge expectations arising out of that. We received 5,700 responses to the consultation: 2,500 for the application for an area south of Lough Neagh and 3,131 for an area in south-west Fermanagh. Work is ongoing to identify and consider the complex issues and concerns that have been raised. However, it is clear from the analysis to date that the possible environmental impacts and the potential risks to health are the main concern of communities where such licences are concerned.

My Department is undertaking a strategic review of petroleum licensing policy that will include independent research aimed at developing a better understanding of the economic, environmental and societal impacts. That, along with advice from experts in other Departments, will help inform consideration of the issues raised through the consultation. Therefore, in answer to your question, this is the strategic way forward. We will await the outcomes of the consultations and the reviews, and then we will have that discussion in the House.

Mr Durkan: The Minister will more than likely be aware of the huge strength of feeling and, indeed, opposition in the Sperrins region to proposed gold-mining activities there. While most of the objections will be environmental in nature, there are concerns about an economic impact. Does the Minister have a view on the impact that that type of activity could have on existing industries such as tourism and agriculture?

Mrs Dodds: My understanding is that the Department for Infrastructure is in receipt of a planning application for exploration for gold. The planning decision in relation to the exploration is for the Minister for Infrastructure to take.

Some Members: Oh.

Mrs Dodds: OK? I will let you all take a break.

On 11 February, as part of the consultation process, the Health and Safety Executive submitted an update on the application for gold. It is a controversial subject. It has the potential to impact on communities, on tourism and on agriculture, but those are planning decisions and generally not for the Department for the Economy. There is also a potential for job creation. However, the decisions cannot

be taken in isolation. They should be taken as part of a package. Therefore, it is important that the whole package is considered when we look at applications for proposed mining.

Ms Armstrong: The removal of mineral permissions, as we know, was never really introduced in Northern Ireland, and we wait for the Minister for Infrastructure to bring that forward. Many of us have quarries in our areas that are, to be honest, extremely concerning. Can the Minister confirm that we have people going out across the world, selling the benefits of mining in Northern Ireland without considering the impact on our local communities? Is the Minister in any way surprised that, whenever these mines open, communities are extremely angry and do not understand why this is being sold on the world stage? Perhaps the Minister can clarify what communication she will have with communities to explain why we are selling Northern Ireland in that way when they are so opposed to it?

Mrs Dodds: I will answer the question in two parts. I understand that communities can be anxious and distraught at the potential for mining in their area. It is important to say that the environmental and planning considerations are not for me to take; it is for the private sector, in pursuing its interest in possible exploration in Northern Ireland, to take on. I presume that the Member will be aware that there has been some controversy about members of my Department taking part in a convention in Canada and about their proposed attendance at a convention on the issue in Canada in March of this year. As a new Minister, just in place, I asked for the public interest test to be applied to attendance at last year's conference, and that concluded that a future review of this was required. I will ask my Department to review this further, and then we will decide if this in the public interest and if it is a value-for-money exercise for officials from my Department to take part in, and then we will make a decision based on those two issues alone.

Mr Stalford: On the theme of the public interest, can the Minister give us her assessment of the need and demand for these minerals?

Mrs Dodds: We live at a time when we are progressing with new technologies that require minerals to progress through to their economic benefit, technologies in wind power, solar cells, batteries and electric cars that are essential if we are to meet zero-carbon targets in the future. Modern living also depends on mobile phones, tablets and laptops, which all require metals for their production. Lithium, copper, nickel and cobalt are essential to growing our green economy, given the high dependence on battery technology. Northern Ireland may have the potential to provide those minerals. Therefore, the requirement from our new and emerging technologies and our environmental restraints mean that we need minerals to be part of that everyday exercise. We must have a sound basis to develop those policies, and that is why I am asking for a review of licensing and further economic research on the societal and economic impacts of mining. We should not go ahead without any of those measures being in place, and it is an area that I intend to take forward in my remaining time in office.

Mr Carroll: The Minister stated that there were some 5,000 consultation responses about the application for drilling in the Lough Neagh and Belfast areas, including parts of my constituency.

Given that there is considerable opposition to the application, including by my party, which submitted several thousand objections to it, and ongoing concern about the environment, will she give an indication of whether she will rule out granting the licence?

2.15 pm

Mrs Dodds: I cannot give that indication because the consultation responses are under review and will be informed by further work that my Department is doing. We take the issue seriously. It is not something that we should be doing without good policy and environmental protections in place.

Brexit: Departmental Business Plan

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for the Economy for her assessment of whether the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 undermines strategic objective 6 of her Department's 2019-2020 business plan. (AQO 164/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Member for his question. It refers to the regulatory environment that would optimise our economic opportunities while protecting consumers and workers. I am committed to ensuring that our regulatory system optimises economic opportunities for business and commerce while protecting consumers and workers.

My business regulation officials continue to progress casework and activities as normal. The existing bodies of regulatory legislation, including employment legislation, are already incorporated into Northern Ireland law, and there will be no changes, during the transition period, that diverge from required EU standards. Any future divergence, at our initiative, would require consultation and Assembly approval for legislation.

More generally, I am concerned about the potential for regulatory barriers to trade with our largest market: Great Britain. Great Britain is a key market for Northern Ireland business, with sales of goods to Great Britain representing 48% of total goods sold in Northern Ireland in 2017. Goods purchased from GB during the same period represented 63% of all Northern Ireland purchases. I am working hard at the Executive and with our Government to ensure that our businesses do not experience frictions to trade with GB, and I also wish to protect consumers from any adverse impacts, particularly the most vulnerable, who are most at risk from rising prices and, indeed, perhaps, restricted choice. Many of the policies that could cause frictions to trade are reserved policy areas, so I am working to hold the UK Government to account on their commitments to unfettered access to the market.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. The original question asked to what extent the withdrawal agreement Act undermined her strategic objective 6, namely:

"Deliver a regulatory environment that optimises economic opportunities for business and commerce".

Perhaps the Minister could focus her next comments on that specific.

Mrs Dodds: The withdrawal agreement Act gives us the Northern Ireland protocol, in which the issues that I outlined are real, live and fundamental to our economy. In the wider terms of the withdrawal agreement Act, what we

have is the transportation of EU law into Northern Ireland's law. That means that, for the transition period, nothing will change, and, therefore, we remain the same. Under the protocol and its operation, we remain the same in terms of manufactured goods and agri-food. I am concerned, but I will work to ensure that we minimise frictions and that the operation of the protocol does not impact unduly on Northern Ireland's businesses in our trade from Northern Ireland to GB or from GB to Northern Ireland. I raised the issue with the Executive's Brexit committee, and it was agreed that that would be a priority for us.

Last week, I took the time to meet and talk to Conor Burns, the International Trade Minister in the United Kingdom Government. I raised with him issues such as our participation in UK trade deals, which is very important to Northern Ireland and is part of the protocol and withdrawal agreement. Another important issue for trade here is our full participation in the trade remedies authority, which will be established by the trade Bill, which will soon come back to our national Parliament.

Mr Humphrey: Given that mainland GB is Northern Ireland's largest market, how can the Minister ensure that the unfettered access that the Prime Minister promised is delivered to and implemented by business and trade in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Dodds: As I have said many times, in Committee and now in the House, our most important market, and fundamental to the growth of our economy, is our market with GB. We do more there than in any other part of our marketing areas. It is vital, therefore, that we protect that trade. The Prime Minister promised us unfettered access to the United Kingdom's internal market, and the Executive and Assembly need to ensure that the Prime Minister is held to account in order to achieve that unfettered access to our most important market.

The United Kingdom Government committed to including the Executive on the delegation for the joint committee that will look at those trading issues. We need to ensure that we maximise our influence in that forum. I understand that the Prime Minister has also written to the First Minister and deputy First Minister and indicated that he will hold to his promise of unfettered access.

Mr Allister: How can the Minister optimise the economic opportunities if access to and from our biggest market is fettered? Whereas the hyperbole of the Prime Minister might be very soothing, is it compatible with the cold print of the withdrawal agreement?

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Member for his question, which gets to some very important points. It is the Prime Minister's promise to Northern Ireland that there will be unfettered access. It is up to us to ensure that he is held to that promise. Unlike the Member, I will not take the European Union view on this: I will work with my Government in London to ensure that that unfettered access is a reality. It is a fact and is absolutely undeniable: it is the most important thing that we can do to ensure that the fundamentals of our market access are secure to Great Britain.

As to the hyperbole of the Prime Minister, it is not for me, neither do I have the time nor energy, to engage in that kind of philosophical debate today.

Mr O'Toole: Going back to the initial premise of the question, objective 6 in the Department's strategic plan

states that the Department for the Economy will work to have more people in better-paid jobs. It also talks about a more competitive, balanced economy. Does the Minister agree that the Home Secretary's announcement last week about new immigration rules flies in the face of that and that it is an appalling set of proposals that will damage the Northern Ireland economy? Will she also reflect on the fact that it is another set of broken promises from the Government in London?

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Member for his question. The provision of more and better jobs is a primary objective of my Department. Since becoming Minister, I have been delighted to announce 85 jobs in connection with Microsoft, as well announcing on Friday a further 155 jobs at a business in Coleraine. Investing in jobs is investing in people, in families and in communities. That is fundamental, and I hold it very dear.

On the immigration rules and the proposals that were set out last week, we can agree with business and business representatives that the salary threshold is a problem for Northern Ireland. Although I have absolutely no desire to make Northern Ireland a low-wage economy that appeals to the lowest common denominator of the market, on average, the salary threshold is an issue for Northern Ireland. Many of our key industries, such as tourism, which is thriving in Northern Ireland, rely on people who come to live and work amongst us. Therefore, it is important that we are able to retain those people. Perhaps one of the issues that is not often talked about — you referred to the competitiveness of our economy, which is hugely important — is the fact that we share a land border with an EU member state where there will be much less immigration control. I do not want the competitiveness of our companies and our economy to be impacted by those issues. I understand that we as an Executive are writing to express our concerns to the Prime Minister, and we hope to meet him on those issues in the reasonably near future.

Dr Archibald: I refer to strategic objective 6. A Law Centre event on Brexit and employment rights was held in the Assembly today. Given that the withdrawal agreement protocol on Ireland commits to no diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity and that employment is a devolved matter, does the Minister agree that we must continue to meet at least the EU standard going forward and look to strengthen employment rights?

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Member for her question. As someone who has spent a lot of time in the European institutions, I think that we should reflect on this idea that we as a nation and as a country are not sympathetic enough, democratic enough or aware enough to ensure that we have our own appropriate and proper employment rights. The body of European law has now been transposed to the United Kingdom and, therefore, applies in Northern Ireland. My Department has responsibility for that area, and I will, of course, keep a close eye on it.

Since becoming Minister, I introduced the early conciliation service, which is a benefit to employees in resolving issues that have become protracted and difficult. As most people know, I wish to introduce rights for bereaved parents. Those are just a few of the areas that I will keep a watching brief on. I will work with my officials to ensure that we have appropriate, sensitive and legally watertight employment laws.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister give a clear commitment to implement fully the withdrawal agreement Northern Ireland protocol?

Mrs Dodds: I will commit today to working with our Government to ensure that the protocol — I am always struck by some Members who want to tie us up in EU legislation for ever and a day — is used to make sure that our economy is not hindered by any of the issues that I have talked about — access to trade and trade agreements — and that we do not put up barriers to our most important economy in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Our access to the United Kingdom's internal market is fundamental.

As well as that, I will encourage our cross-border trade; I will encourage our trade with the rest of Europe; and, of course, I will encourage our trade with the rest of the world. Those are all fundamental opportunities. We must see the situation that we are now in as one where we guard against problems and look for opportunity.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions. Questions 4 and 7 have been withdrawn.

EU Work-life Balance Directive

T1. **Mr Gildernew** asked the Minister for the Economy whether she has set a time frame for the implementation of the EU work-life balance directive that was approved by the EU council in June 2019. (AQT 121/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: No.

Mr Gildernew: Does the Minister recognise and agree that working carers are some of the most disadvantaged in our society and that they struggle to juggle their caring responsibilities along with accessing, retaining and protecting their progression in work? I ask the Minister to consider implementing that directive as speedily as possible.

Mrs Dodds: I agree that we need to take care of those amongst us who work in difficult occupations with the vulnerable and that we should provide a proper work/life balance for people in those roles. I know what it is like to be a carer. It is a difficult position for people to be in, and often the demands are 24/7. I understand the issues from a personal perspective, and, while we will look at all aspects of employment law, it is important that we recognise the fundamental principles. At my previous Question Time, I said that we should aim to have not just a legally watertight system but a compassionate one.

Northern Ireland Centenary Celebrations

T2. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy what plans her Department is putting in place to celebrate the centenary of Northern Ireland next year. (AQT 122/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Member for her question. Next year is a significant year for Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland will be 100 years old, and, while we will celebrate a past century, we will look forward to a future century of progress in this part of the United Kingdom.

As Minister for the Economy, I have been reflecting on this important milestone in our community. At the turn of the last century, Northern Ireland led the way in shipbuilding, linen manufacturing and rope-works, and Belfast was a hub of manufacturing activity. Today, Northern Ireland leads the way in fintech, cybersecurity and new digital technologies. I have also been reflecting that my constituency is due to have a new visitor attraction from a renowned and very famous production company situated in an old linen mill, where we have married the past and the present. I have been thinking along those lines, and I think that we have a great story to tell.

I want to see us produce tourism projects to use the opportunity to market Northern Ireland further on the world stage. When I go to America in March, I will do that to a number of new companies. It is an opportunity not just to look at tourism and the economy but to provide skills for our young people so that we can grow and provide the proper skills to match the future of Northern Ireland.

Ms P Bradley: Coming from a strong east Belfast family that worked in the shipyard and the rope-works, I am glad to hear that. I am also glad to hear that we have moved on considerably since then. I want to home in on what the Minister said about skills for our young people. They are our future and the future for Northern Ireland for the next century. Can you please give an undertaking to ensure that we do our utmost for our young people by upskilling them in the skills that we need?

Mrs Dodds: As we think of Northern Ireland's centenary, it is important that we consider the future and allow people to celebrate in all our communities, both old and new to this part of the world, and that we build for the future.

The skills agenda is huge in my portfolio. I recently attended a wonderful showcase for our apprentices and higher-level apprentices. I want to see us develop more skills that are relevant to our economy, not just skills that help people into work but skills that will help them to develop along their journey of work. That is the way in which we can make our communities stronger and more prosperous and the way in which we can have a more inclusive and stable Northern Ireland.

Tuition Fees

T3. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister for the Economy, given her recent comments, which he welcomed, that students should not be priced out of university, especially in the light of her party leader's recent pronouncements on the issue, whether those comments can be taken as an indication that she will not support raising tuition fees here. (AQT 123/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Of course, if you had read the full text of what my party leader said, you would have seen that that is not what she said. Anyway, we will not let the truth get in the way of a good story.

I want to see us widening opportunity for all our communities. That is an important and fundamental aspect of the work that I will do. I do not want to see students priced out of education. When we talk about reviewing university funding, we should not pick on students as the one aspect that we can drive for higher prices and better margins. We will review the whole issue of higher and further education funding in the next year to 18 months.

It is important that we look at it in the round. I want to see opportunity and education advanced to all communities. It is important that I stick by the comment that I do not want to see anyone priced out of education.

Mr Carroll: I thank the Minister for her response, but it is disappointing that she did not rule out tuition fees going up in this Assembly term. Is it fair that people who availed themselves of free education can tell students that they have to be landed with a mountain of debt when they come out of university?

Mrs Dodds: Since that can be directed only at people of my generation and era, I will answer it personally. I was the first in my family to go to university. University and education opened up a huge number of opportunities to me. Those opportunities should be extended to all young people. I am therefore committed to taking forward a fair review. I am not looking to price people out of education or to saddle youngsters with debt that will stay with them for a long time, but we must look at the issues in the round and arrive at a conclusion that we can all be satisfied with.

We also have to allow our universities to advance, grow and progress. There is a balance to be struck, but, if we keep the principles in mind, we can come to that very fair balance in the end.

Derry City and Strabane District Council: Project Approval

T5. **Ms Mullan** asked the Minister for the Economy when she will approve Derry City and Strabane District Council's strategic outline cases for two innovation and two digital projects currently on her desk. (AQT 125/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Those issues are working their way through the system. When they come to me in the fullness of time, we will look at them in the round.

Ms Mullan: I thank the Minister for her response. Given the Minister's earlier answer on the centenary, she will understand that, in looking to the future and developing skills, these are important projects for Derry, Strabane and the wider north-west. In keeping with the commitments to target resources on the basis of objective need and to tackle regional disparities laid out in both the Programme for Government and 'New Decade, New Approach', I urge the Minister to give a time frame for a decision on the proposals.

Mrs Dodds: It is clear to anyone who has read my recent comments that I am committed to building an economy across Northern Ireland for all of its communities. That includes the north-west, the south-west and all parts of Northern Ireland. It is important that I state that again today. We will progress the issues that she raises in as timely a manner as we can.

Viewable Media UK Ltd/Grenke

T6. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what interim and long-term support her Department will give to the over 400 businesses here that are facing financial hardship due to advertising deals with Viewable Media UK Ltd and Grenke, notwithstanding the fact that an ombudsman's investigation is ongoing. (AQT 126/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The Member's colleague spoke to me about the issue last week, and I have passed it to officials for a review. As soon as we have conclusions, I will commit

to talking to both you and your colleague to see if we can identify a way forward and work with it. It seems scandalous that this has gone on for some time, but we are working on it. I got the information last week, and I will talk to you when it is available to me.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her response and her commitment. I ask the Minister to meet not only ourselves but the stakeholders, some of whom were up here campaigning last week. It is important that we understand the fine level of detail that impacts on what really are difficult times for struggling businesses.

Mrs Dodds: I accept that completely. As soon as we have looked at and worked through the issues, I will talk to you. We can meet whatever groups it is necessary to meet. That is not a problem.

Immigration: Impact on Local Businesses

T8. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for the Economy, given that she answered a question in a similar vein earlier, for an assessment of the likely impact on local businesses of the new immigration regime being proposed by the UK Government. (AQT 128/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: We want to make sure that, as we go forward in this new era independent of the European Union, we maximise opportunity but also try to limit the difficulties that face us. Obviously, we are in a very fluid and new situation in relation to the immigration rules. I have listened carefully to business, the service sector, tourism and the healthcare sector, where there are many issues around the level of wage control that there will be. However, there is also an opportunity to ensure that we do not sink to the lowest common denominator in our wage economy. The situation is new and fluid. When we have conducted the impact assessments, we will make any advice available.

2.45 pm

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware of the Home Secretary's figures on economically inactive people that were announced over the weekend, which have been largely rubbished by everybody in sight because they are so utterly inaccurate and preposterous and not worth consideration. They include carers, students and retired people, and they are expected to take on the jobs of immigrants. Will she agree with me that that is quite ridiculous and that there might even be a case for differentiation in terms of Northern Ireland?

Mrs Dodds: I understand the Member's question about the economically inactive, and it is an issue that I will have to grapple with in the Department. In Northern Ireland, we still have a relatively high economically inactive percentage in the population and therefore I want to see more people back in work and to see more flexible routes to get people back into work. However, that does not take away from his basic and valid point that many of those people who are described as economically inactive are people who perform incredibly important caring roles, are students or have a disability. There are fundamental challenges in relation to this. I have already set out concerns around the salary level for people coming to Northern Ireland. This is one area on which we can make representation to our Government, and I know that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have committed to doing that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That concludes our business. I thank the Minister.

Education

Climate Emergency

1. **Dr Archibald** asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to introduce education on the climate emergency into the curriculum. (AQO 193/17-22)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): I thank the Member for her question. This is a very important subject, as was highlighted by the fact that it was one of the first debates in the Assembly, and I know that the Member opposite was instrumental in bringing forward that motion.

Climate change should concern us all and the Executive, as a whole, are committed to tackling it, and New Decade, New Approach signalled its intention to develop a strategy to address the immediate and longer-term impact.

Education plays a critical role in educating our youngest citizens on this subject, and sustainable development is already part of the curriculum at primary level via The World Around Us and through the environment and society elements of learning at Key Stage 3. During that, pupils will explore environmental and climate change and how to exercise environmental stewardship, and are helped to develop an understanding of the need for environmental change to be sustainable. Pupils can gain an understanding of the interdependence of society, the economy and the environment and can develop respect for the needs of present and future generations and the importance of securing a sustainable environment. Pupils also have the opportunity to pursue qualifications at Key Stage 4 and post-16 that explicitly cover issues relevant to climate change.

The curriculum is designed to be adaptable and dynamic. It devolves a great deal of autonomy to schools and trusts the professionalism of teachers. The aim is to lift the burden of prescription and allow space for innovative approaches to learning. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment supports this by developing curricular resources for schools and teachers, including resources that cover issues like climate change. Of course, there is always more that can be done, and my Department will be working alongside the rest of the Executive to develop that climate change strategy.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Minister for his response. Young people have been to the fore of the activism that has been highlighting the climate emergency and should be commended for that, but does the Minister agree that we need to harness and encourage that? Does he agree that, while respecting the need for flexibility and the devolution of certain abilities to schools to set their own curriculum priorities, there needs to be, as part of that, evidence- and science-based education on the causes of the climate emergency and the impact of that on all of our lives?

Mr Weir: I would like to think that, particularly when we are talking about science issues, it is always evidence-based. From the point of view of the curriculum, I will make two points. I have a great deal of faith in our schools and our teachers to be able to use their autonomy wisely, and I do not think that it is particularly my role to impose on them. Indeed, I am under a restriction, as any Education

Minister would be — it is the right restriction — under the 2006 Order, which means that Ministers are barred from indicating particular time frames to schools that they need to set aside for particular subjects. That is about ensuring that there is not micromanagement or interference. It is right that we have evidence-based teaching, rather than any attempt by any Minister, of whatever description, to impose what they believe to be important through micromanagement of the curriculum.

The important thing is to ensure that there are opportunities for our pupils but that schools are not simply left on their own. That is why the role of CCEA in developing materials is important. It is the case that, while there may be particular teachers and schools that feel very passionately about particular subjects, they do not, in and of themselves, possess the expertise to draw down their own materials. Therefore, it is important that that bank of evidence-, science- and expertise-based materials is available to them.

Mr Newton: Does the Minister have any plans to convert the school estate to more sustainable energy sources?

Mr Weir: As indicated, as part of the overall process, we have been working with the Executive to see what wider context we can prevail on. My Department already invests in a wide range of measures to reduce carbon emissions in the school estate. That includes certain efficiency measures, such as boiler replacement installation, the installation of LED lighting and solar panels and the provision of energy monitors, as well as encouraging sustainable lifestyles and travel. While those are important first steps, the cross-departmental future generations group will seek to address climate change and mitigate its impact. Those, of course, are over and above the individual actions that a range of schools take. For instance, quite a number of schools have embraced Eco-Schools and the aim of getting that flag of indication that they are environmentally friendly. We need to encourage that and to provide that level of support where possible.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister agree that it is important, particularly with people of an impressionable age, to debunk the hysteria that attends this subject and, indeed, to deal with the tendency towards anarchy among, for example, the Extinction Rebellion protests? Does he further agree that it is very important that, when our children deal with the subject, they do so in a balanced way, that eco-fascists do not put their view upon them and that people who would lead them, for example, into the anarchy of Extinction Rebellion are properly addressed as an example that is not to be followed?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): There may have been a number of questions there. The Minister can choose which to answer.

Mr Weir: I will pick from the gamut of questions that have been put to me. As we are speaking in the Assembly, I am sure that the Deputy Speaker would agree that avoiding anarchy, where possible, is always a useful direction of travel.

As I indicated to the original questioner, it is important that teaching is based on evidence and science and that the issues are tackled rationally. People will have particular passions, but it is important that teaching is done in such a way that imparts the information in a balanced and evidential manner. People may be passionate, but

it is important that they do not embrace a route that is disruptive to others. It is also important that we have respect for one another in how we express our views.

Mr Lyttle: What action is the Minister taking to encourage cycling proficiency and safe routes to school to support a modal shift in transport and to promote sustainable, active travel for children and young people?

Mr Weir: The role that home-to-school transport, in particular, can play is important. It has been encouraging to see schools working with organisations such as Sustrans to develop that. At the moment, 84,000 pupils each day are involved in home-to-school transport that is provided by school buses. Every opportunity should be taken to encourage greater mobility, either on foot or cycling. The current review of home-to-school transport, which we will come to later, looks at how we deliver the aim of reducing emissions. I have some nostalgia — although, quite clearly, it is not applicable in every case — about my own school days, when I walked to and from school. I suspect that some of those days are gone; as Members will appreciate, it was quite a long time ago that I was at primary school. We should do everything that we can to encourage cycling and walking, and a healthier lifestyle at school level and, probably, around the Chamber would be useful if we all adopted it.

Mr McGrath: I will avoid the temptation to comment on the last response. Will the Minister outline his Department's position on allowing pupils to join future strike movements on climate change? Will he give a guarantee that no pupil will be punished for such?

Mr Weir: It is important that people express their passions and support for different organisations, but I do not want to see them being taken out of school to do that. There is a distinction between what people do outside of school hours — there is great value in expressing that passion — and disrupting the school day, which I am not in favour of. Ultimately, any discipline that is applied to a pupil is, in the first instance, for the school; it has to draw its own conclusion. I want to see it being done in a productive way that does not disrupt others. To take a leaf out of Mr Allister's book, it should be done in a non-hysterical way across the board so that we can have calm, rational discussions. These are very serious issues for the future of not only schools but our planet, so they have to be tackled in a calm, non-sensationalist way. As I said, I am not keen on situations in which pupils are taken out of school unnecessarily.

Miss Woods: Without going into the previous subject or the importance of listening to our young people, who are leading the way on this matter and are doing a lot of the work that the rest of us are not, does the Minister agree, given the urgency of the issue, that climate science and sustainability should be included in teacher training?

Mr Weir: There is an unusual situation in teacher training: the role for the Department of Education is largely to prescribe the numbers. The Department for the Economy then produces the financial support for that. The detail of the curriculum is largely provided by the institutions themselves. A wide range of things need to be built into that. Again, I am not going to micromanage by saying what precisely should be involved in initial teacher education, but there is good work to be done between the Departments and the teacher institutions to ensure that

teachers are prepared fully for the full curriculum that lies ahead.

Minor Works Programme: Funding

2. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to ensure that funding for the minor works programme meets current and emerging needs. (AQO 194/17-22)

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for her question. My Department has made significant investment in the schools estate through minor improvement works. The expenditure in 2016-17 was £66 million. In 2017-18, it was £63.8 million, and, in 2018-19, it was £84.2 million. The budget for the current year for minor works is £83.2 million, which is roughly about half of the overall total outside of non-ring-fenced expenditure.

Despite the increasing investment in minor works, significant demand for further improvement remains. As we increase the relative expenditure on major works and the school enhancement programme over the next five years, that will be an important element of improving the overall health of the estate in the medium to long term. Although there can be certain situations where there is a quick fix because something is needed very quickly, it is also about improving the overall stock of the estate. A balance needs to be struck in the Department's capital budget to deal with immediate minor works pressures and the more strategic investments in major works and SEPs. If those are successful, the demand for minor works will reduce.

My Department will continue to bid for additional funding to enhance the school estate. If the Member can influence her friend the Finance Minister to provide that capital funding, the money will be gratefully received by the Department.

3.00 pm

Ms Anderson: I refer the Minister to what he just said about a healthier lifestyle. Minister, in your role, you will know how important that is for children. In the context of physical health and well-being, I want to ask him about St Joseph's Boys' School in Derry. Six years ago, the school was promised a 3G pitch, and it is still waiting. Given the funding allocation that you received and the implication of the British Government's austerity cuts on the Executive, I can understand how you will struggle at times and have to prioritise. However, six years ago, that school was promised a 3G pitch and is still waiting. I say that in the context of physical health and well-being and their importance to children.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for her supplementary. On the Department of Education's mainstream funding, one thing is for sure: we will make sure that the capital funding is spent. Whether it is a mix of major capital works, strategic estate partnerships and minor works, we will make sure that there is the fullest delivery possible.

I am happy to look in detail at the specifics of St Joseph's. As the Member will appreciate, I do not have to hand the detail on the exact capital position of every school in the country. I commit to finding out the situation in regard to any delays at St Joseph's, and I will write to the Member in connection with that.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will be aware that officials from his Department and the Education Authority have

been in front of the Committee in recent weeks. At those meetings, members expressed concern about the state of the schools estate, giving a number of examples, as I do now: Glenwood Primary School in my constituency of North Belfast. How much does the Department spend annually on maintenance across the schools estate in Northern Ireland?

Mr Weir: There can be a slightly artificial dividing line between what constitutes minor works and what counts as maintenance. Financial pressures in maintenance will come directly out of the resource budget.

The figures are that £19.4 million was invested in 2016-17; a further £16 million in 2017-18; and £20.5 million in 2018-19, the last full financial year. The maintenance budget for this year is approximately £18.5 million. In addition to that, there was approximately £90 million of investment in minor capital works. With that cocktail of measures, the aim must be to deal with the immediate pressures to ensure that there is a balance between those and other more major capital works. To some extent, the more that can be directly invested in major capital works, the more that eases the burden on maintenance. There is a belief that an additional amount needs to be found for maintenance next year, which I will certainly try to do.

We sought a range of minor works a number of years ago. The very large pool of works that was produced is gradually being worked through. However, we have to ensure that the maintenance takes place at the same time. It is about getting the balance in the cocktail right.

Ms S Bradley: Does the Minister have any concerns that there are schools across Northern Ireland that may be in breach of health and safety standards and fire protection standards or might be inaccessible to pupils with disabilities, visiting parents or general staff? Will he find a more cost-effective way of delivering the remedial work required in those instances?

Mr Weir: The Member makes two points. There is a particular issue with some of the maintenance work. We need to look at where the delegation of budgets lies and give greater opportunity for lower-level procurement from within schools. That is very significant, and a later question also deals with that.

Where any maintenance or minor works give rise to particular issues of health and safety — I am not saying that all of those have been solved across the school estate — they will always jump to the front of the queue. Any risk to pupils must come top of the list. One of the frustrations, particularly where minor works are concerned, is that we have a ranked list of those works from the previous call. That is, and rightly so, subject to change. An electrical issue or something else concerning health and safety may be identified, and that will supersede the pre-existing list, so there will always be an attempt to prioritise it. As with other issues, there are not unlimited resources, so we can do only as much as we can. Dealing with anything that puts any child at risk has to be top of the list.

School Transport

3. **Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Education, in light of the home-to-school transport review, what changes he will make to school transport provision. (AQO 195/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department's ongoing review of home-to-school transport aims to ensure that the policy is fit for purpose and sustainable over the long term. The review is focusing on the current policy, and any changes proposed as a result will be subject to full public consultation. Home-to-school transport plays an important role not only in supporting the attendance of pupils at schools but in contributing to a number of wider government policy aims, such as the reduction of air pollution and of traffic congestion. By its nature and because, for instance, there is considerable reliance on organisations like Translink, this is very much a cross-cutting issue, and, therefore, if there was any proposal for policy change, it would be brought to the Executive. It is not a unilateral matter for the Department of Education.

Mr McHugh: Thank you, Minister, for your response. Unfortunately, my supplementary question, which I raise on behalf of people who live in the Glenmoran and Domemana area, is stimulated as a result of a negative experience at a time of amalgamation of schools. As a representative of that rural area, I ask the Minister to ensure that any changes that he intends to make to school transport provision meet the needs of rural people and ensure that they are not left disadvantaged. The experience to date has been that amalgamations have, unfortunately, left some people out in the cold.

Mr Weir: The Member makes a very valid point. The figures are such that the vast majority — I think, off the top of my head, it is about 67,000 out of that 84,000 — are pupils transported in rural areas. It may well be that, through a wider consultation, a range of options will be offered in different directions. It is important that those take particular account of the rural community. It is also the case that, particularly where there are amalgamations, we need to ensure that those are given sufficient weight and opportunity to be heard. Quite often, amalgamation will provide a good educational way forward and produce a sound economic way forward, but it will create levels of financial pressure in the first place. It is important that, whatever point is reached in home-to-school transport, the schools are clearly accessible to those pupils and the opportunity is given for them to be able to have the fullest education as a result.

Mr McCrossan: Has the Minister any plans to review the distances required to satisfy school transport? There are quite a number of pupils in my area who just miss out. They live in very rural and dangerous parts of the constituency. They could not possibly consider walking to school and do not have any access to any form of transportation.

Mr Weir: At this stage, there is a series of options, none of which any particular conclusion has been drawn on. The overall distance requirement in either direction has to be on the table to be looked at. I think that the distances being used were produced in the 1940s, so there is an argument about whether they are necessarily fit for purpose. Balanced against that must be the pressure on the wider public purse and, obviously, the impact that it has on transport.

The Member highlights a problem, and it is difficult to find a solution that solves it.

He highlights an unfairness that can create problems in communities. For example, in the post-primary sector,

the family of someone who lives 2.99 miles away from a school has to pay the full amount, yet someone who lives three miles and 10 metres away will get free transport. There is a level of inequity there. Finding a solution is probably easier than stating the problem, but two pupils who get on a school bus at exactly the same point will often be treated in a different fashion.

If we reach the stage of having any public consultation, people can give their views on probably a wide range of options. What everybody would like will be against the backdrop of high financial constraints. The issue is not directly related to any particular school, but I appreciate the service that is provided to people.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Minister confirm whether his Department has done any scoping exercise on yellow school buses to see whether they can be used by youth organisations, given the fact that youth organisations also fall under his remit? I am very aware that the yellow buses sit doing nothing most weekends, all summer and during other holiday periods. Very little use is made of them. Your Department is in charge of youth services as well, so I am interested to know what scoping exercise has been done to make those vehicles available, with or without driver, to youth organisations.

Mr Weir: As we move forward and as part of wider home-to-school transport provision, we will look at interaction with other Departments. The issue raised interacts with the Department for Infrastructure's remit.

We need to realise that there will be a programme to replace buses. Ultimately, a bus can produce only a certain mileage, so it is not simply a question of buses lying idle. Although we want to make sure that there is maximum usage made of them, that may have the knock-on effect of those buses having to be replaced sooner. That will also need to be factored in. I am open to any suggestions. We need to see a much more joined-up approach across transport as a whole. I know that the Member has a background in community transport, and I am sure that she has detailed thoughts that she will want to share.

Mr M Bradley: What improvements are being made to school transport service delivery?

Mr Weir: School transport lies largely with the Education Authority (EA). It is not and has not been in a position to make policy changes, but it has made a range of operational improvements to home-to-school transport to try to make it more effective and accessible, particularly with the launch of the online eligibility checker tool, which gives parents a much quicker indication of whether their child will be eligible for transport. That has been quite successful. Indeed, in the current academic year, there were 27,000 applications.

The authority has also digitalised its transport network to improve the accuracy of its eligibility assessment. As part of the Department of Finance's small business research initiative, the EA is piloting a new digital tool to improve safety on board buses, allowing pupils, parents and schools to use an online app to track the bus on its journey. A business case is also being considered on replacement of buses, and that will feed into the level of modern-day provision that can be made. Therefore, there is a range of things.

Mr Beggs: In the home-to-school transport review, has there been an acknowledgement that many bus stops are inadequate? There may not be a safe location off-road, and those buses serving many villages and hamlets do not even have a shelter where young people can take cover from the winter storms. Will the Minister undertake to engage with other Ministers, particularly the Minister for Infrastructure, to see how the situation can be improved?

Mr Weir: To a large extent, any improvements to the layout of roads, places for a bus to stop to allow people to disembark or embark and issues with bus shelters lie outside the remit of my Department, but I am happy to work with others to see what improvements can be made.

3.15 pm

Head Teachers

5. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to enhance the powers and autonomy of head teachers. (AQO 197/17-22)

Mr Weir: I acknowledge the continued commitment and professional leadership that is shown by school leaders. Head teachers, subject to the agreement of their boards of governors, are afforded considerable levels of autonomy on a day-to-day basis that mainly covers responsibility for internal organisation, management discipline of their schools and the implementation of the school development plans. They also have autonomy in areas of workforce management such as managing absence and timetabling.

I am open to seeing where there can be other measures to increase autonomy. Whenever it has been mooted in the past, there has been a mixed bag of responses from school principals, but, in issues such as minor procurement, there is a good case for a more relaxed regime that enables, if you like, delivery on the ground. Again, it is part of an overall position of putting trust in the professionalism of our teaching workforce.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): There is time for a very brief supplementary question.

Mr Stalford: I am very grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker. On financial deregulation and management, the Minister mentioned small procurement, which is a particular issue here. How do we compare with other UK regions?

Mr Weir: England and Wales are very similar to ourselves at present. The Republic of Ireland has a much more centralised system. Scotland is not part of the same local management style, and therefore funding arrangements have a much greater level of central control. We need to develop what is appropriate to our needs.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Transfer Testing: Negative Impact

T1. **Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Education whether, in the light of the report produced by Right to Education (R2E) in June 2019, which found that 92% of teachers felt that transfer testing had a significant negative impact on the health of children, he will consider his position on the use of academic selection in schools. (AQT 131/17-22)

Mr Weir: As Yogi Berra once said, "It's déjà vu all over again, Boo-Boo". There is no doubt that there is not a level of consensus about academic selection at both an academic level and a political level. I am keen that we do not disappear down that level of rabbit hole. I am supportive both of the right of schools to use academic selection and of academic selection. The reason I say that is that, if we make a comparison with England, we see a situation where selection will happen, because there will always be schools that are oversubscribed, but the alternative they employ is that a section of the school population is effectively private education, where selection happens very much by the ability to pay. We have seen many prominent figures in neighbouring jurisdictions who have benefited from private education, but that is because they had wealthier parents. Whatever the flaws in academic selection, replacing it with a system that would inevitably have a greater emphasis on the ability to pay would be a retrograde step for academic achievement and social mobility.

Mr McHugh: I agree that, if the type of school a person goes to was based on how well-off a person is, that system should in every way be confronted. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Children's Commissioner, the OECD and the trade union movement have all called for an end to academic selection in schools. Is the Minister content to see the continued use of academic selection in schools in the light of the evidence against it?

Mr Weir: Again, I have indicated that you need to look not only at where we are today but at what the position would be if we did not have academic selection. I am tempted to say that I refer the Member to the answer I gave John O'Dowd at Question Time a fortnight ago. I note that the Member is at one with me at least on the first point, in that he does not want to see a system that is driven by the ability to pay. Inevitably, if we simply remove academic selection, that is what will happen. We have seen it happen in other jurisdictions. In England, around 7% of the school population attends public schools, on the basis of the ability of their parents to pay for it, and there is a range of private schools in the Republic of Ireland. Whatever is said about the current system here, I think it is fairer. In short, I am not seeking to change the idea of academic selection. If there are measures that can be taken to make it a smoother or less stressful process, that is something we need to embrace. However, it has been, I think, more than a decade since the official tests were abolished, and we see more children going through transfer tests and academic selection, so there is clearly a desire for it. We have to accept that reality, irrespective of where we are on the argument about academic selection.

School Transport

T2. **Mr Catney** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to try to reduce car journeys made by pupils who live within a mile or two of their school gates, given that he might be aware of recently released statistics on the reliance on cars to get pupils to and from schools. (AQT 132/17-22)

Mr Weir: This is about transport to schools. There is an ongoing problem in the use of car transport to schools, which disrupts the quality of life of a lot of neighbours of schools. I know that schools have tried to solve it; some

have a tougher regime than others. Unfortunately, it tends to produce short-term relief that lasts only for a while, and then people will again encroach on the area.

If we can encourage more pupils to walk or cycle to school, perhaps by working with organisations, it will help ease the burden. It is understandable that many parents will take the view that they want to take their child to school in a car, and no amount of dissuading has an impact.

Mr Catney: I am sure that the Minister will agree with me, if he lets me move off the subject for a second, that, in mind of what happens this Saturday — that particular date — many a relationship has been struck up at school. I look at the glances back and forward across the Floor. Everyone who is single, be careful: it is a leap year on the 29th [Laughter.] On a serious note, is the Minister aware of the prohibitive rules for receiving free school transport? Will he address them, specifically to allow more students to avail themselves of that service and therefore cut down the reliance on the motor car?

Mr Weir: The Member mentioned the significance of the date at the end of this month. It is clear that, shall we say, the production of children is not dependent on marriage proposals. I am sure that the Member will be aware of that.

In all seriousness, home to school transport is about balancing the availability of that transport with the public cost. There is a finite budget for education. If, for example, we were all minded to say, "Let us increase the eligibility for home to school transport to a much greater extent and increase the money spent on it", that would come, ultimately, at the expense of school budgets, either directly or as an opportunity cost to them. Consequently, that has to be borne in mind in any discussion that takes place. When proposals on home to school transport are ready, they will be put out to public consultation. It may well be that, when that is done, it is done in an open-ended way, so that we can look at ways in which availability is either increased or decreased. However, they are cross-cutting issues, and they have an impact, particularly on the Department for Infrastructure.

Socially Disadvantaged: Definition

T3. **Ms Kimmins** asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to review the definition of "socially disadvantaged", which is used in the application process for the allocation of preschool places. (AQT 133/17-22)

Mr Weir: I understand that. At the moment, there is a degree of disjoint. There is a longer-term and a short-term situation. The introduction of universal credit has created a level of mismatch. We are examining whether regulations are needed to bring that into line and how that can be done. In the longer run, particularly for preschool placements, there is a commitment in 'New Decade, New Approach' to widen the availability of childcare, particularly for three- to four-year-olds. At the moment, around 62% of those who avail themselves of a preschool place are in part-time settings. We would ease a lot of the problems if we moved to a situation in which whatever is being made is made on a more universal basis. That would inevitably lead to a considerable increase in the overall offer that can be made by increasing the number of places that are available. To some extent, that will also have a role in the longer run in alleviating the situation to ensure that everybody is on a level playing field.

Ms Kimmins: As the Minister will be aware, people in receipt of benefits such as contribution-based employment and support allowance and tax credits do not currently qualify as socially disadvantaged under the preschool application process. Will the Minister consider that when reviewing the process and take it into account?

Mr Weir: As I said, there is an indication that the current situation is not fit for purpose and has a level of mismatch. I will look at the criteria. There is also a balance to be struck: if criteria are simply considerably widened, there will be large financial implications. All those things are interdependent and will be dependent on the available budget. However, where are at present in terms of the qualifiers and what is there in terms of the benefits system do not align with each other. At the very least, there needs to be a greater level of alignment, which, I suspect, will require some form of change in the regulations.

Lea Green Primary Referral Unit

T4. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Education to explain why the Lea Green primary referral unit in Newtownabbey has ceased to provide its much-needed services for children. (AQT 134/17-22)

Mr Weir: I am aware of the very good work that has been done in Lea Green, particularly in dealing with challenging behaviour. A previous questioner mentioned health and safety: it is a health and safety issue that has been raised. The exterior of the mobile classroom was in a poor state of repair, and sections of the outer partition of the building had been damaged by storms. As part of remedial work undertaken by the EA, further health and safety reports were done in 2019 that identified additional issues. In order to support children who had been referred to those provisions, the EA has provided additional in-school resources as a temporary measure. To date, they are not taking any additional referrals. We need to have buildings that are absolutely fit for purpose and meet health and safety requirements. I have often been to schools where what is provided is not ideal but would meet health and safety requirements. If there are health and safety issues, they have to be taken into account in any provision that we make, particularly for children with special educational needs.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer; it certainly answers some questions that local teachers have asked. I know of the unit; it was stuck on to the side of Glengormley youth centre for many years. If they are looking for a suitable location, may I suggest that they look no further than Rathcoole Primary School?

Mr Weir: There will clearly be a replacement. The Education Authority has direct responsibility for deciding on the location and, obviously, will look at the wider interests of the area, particularly around Newtownabbey, Ballyclare, Glengormley and Carrickfergus, to see what will service that. It is not simply that the unit has disappeared; a replacement will be put in place, and, from that point of view, they are examining what would be the most suitable site. I am sure that they will take on board the suggestion of Rathcoole and, indeed, other sites and see what location is best suited and most able to provide that vital support for children with behavioural needs.

3.30 pm

Truancy: Educational Underachievement

T5. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education whether he accepts that the statistics on school attendance by ward that he provided in a recent answer to a written question, which showed that as many as 43% of post-primary school pupils have less than 85% attendance at school, are unacceptable and that those pupils will suffer from educational underachievement. (AQT 135/17-22)

Mr Weir: We need to tackle truancy. The Department is, for example, very much trying to indicate the value of education and the importance of school attendance, and that has been part of the campaigns. When you drill down into individual wards, it can produce relatively small numbers and create a particularly high percentage on that basis. It is undoubtedly the case that, while attendance overall is good, and, indeed, there are levels of academic success, we also have pockets of underachievement. Clearly, attendance at school is a key element in that. While we will look to see what measures can be taken in the short term, as part of the agreement, a panel will be established to look at educational underachievement, and attendance at school will be a key element of that.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister acknowledge that it takes the school, the parent and the community to educate a child and that high levels of poor attendance often show that there are problems, not just at school? Will he liaise with educational welfare, schools and local councils, which have their community plans, on the issue and on the importance of involving all the community?

Mr Weir: I agree with the Member that the answer to issues of attendance and underachievement lies holistically beyond the classroom. We have seen elements of good practice, particularly in parts of Belfast, where there has been that interconnection between the school community, the wider community and the parental community. Trying to build that nexus is critical. There are examples of good practice, and we need to ensure that we roll that out and get an understanding of it so that we can start to tackle those pockets of underachievement.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I thank the Minister. Time is now up. I ask Members to take their ease, please.

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

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 and Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Estimates and Vote on Account 2020-21

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £17,519,166,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 and that resources, not exceeding £21,022,321,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 2(c) and 3(c) of table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,962,895,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 and that resources, not exceeding £9,054,440,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4 and 6 of table 1 in the Northern Ireland Estimates and Vote on Account 2020-21 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

Mr McGuigan: I intend to direct my remarks on the Estimates as party spokesperson on the environment. Before I get there, I welcome the intention of the Finance Minister to secure a Budget for 2020-21 that delivers for public services and for all the citizens here in the North. I also welcome last week's reallocation by the

Finance Minister of this year's Budget across a number of Departments, particularly the £10 million to help to address pressures in our health service, the additional £5 million to help with pressures in education and, indeed, the £3 million to the Department for Infrastructure for winter services, urgent street lighting and road repairs.

I know that in my constituency of North Antrim the totality of the reallocation across the three Departments will be welcome, particularly given that, in the Chamber recently, I asked the Minister for Infrastructure about extending the winter gritting service to rural roads to provide rural communities access, particularly to schools on mornings like this morning, when I know that a number of schools had to close, and a number of children were not able to get to school because of the lack of gritting. I hope that this additional money will allow the Minister to look at that again. I also raised the fact that one electrician looks after street lighting repairs across three councils, from Belfast to Derry, with over 3,000 lights in need of repair. I also highlighted the growing number of potholes appearing on our roads. I hope that the Minister for Infrastructure will spend her recent reallocation swiftly.

Moving on to today's Estimates generally, I welcome the opportunity to debate the existing and forthcoming Budget allocations. As I frame my comments on environmental issues that fall primarily under the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee's watch, it is impossible to discuss the state of our environment and not talk about the impact that a decade of Tory-imposed underinvestment and austerity has had on our environment and natural world. With at least £1 billion stripped from public services across Departments since the beginning of Tory rule in 2010, the impact and cost of missed investment in environmental protection are clear, and there is a knock-on effect from all of that. Just 8% of land in the North, and 11% across the island of Ireland, is forested. Staggeringly, that is just a quarter of the EU average of 35%. The shocking rate of forest cover is symptomatic of the broader state of our natural environment as budgets to invest in its protection were recklessly cut by Westminster.

Just over a third of our water bodies are deemed to be in good condition, and only one of 49 priority habitats in the North is worthy of the badge of favourable status. The effect of endangered habitats on the biodiversity and wildlife synonymous with this island is clear. Ten per cent of all species on the island are in danger of extinction, and 41% of bird species are in measurable decline. All the while, over one million tons of waste in the largest illegal dump in Europe sits idly at Mobuoy, outside Derry, accumulating dangerous toxins that threaten the River Faughan and the wildlife that calls it home.

In the time ahead, as the Minister with responsibility for the environment forms his budget and makes bids for the incoming year, I urge him not to ignore those pressures and the pressing need to improve our natural environment. Now is the time to tackle it. The economics of the environment are clear. We deal with these issues now or we ignore them and suffer the consequence as a society of attempting to deal with a much bigger crisis down the road at a vastly higher cost. In the coming Budget, the Agriculture Department is bidding for £40 million less in capital funding than it received in 2019-2020. Although other pressures exist in the Agriculture Department, as I am sure they do elsewhere, that is potential capital funding

that the Agriculture Minister might bid for to invest in the environmental protection or remediation at Mobuoy that we sorely need.

Commitments in the New Decade, New Approach agreement also seem to be getting some attention, but some attention will not cut the mustard. We are well past the time for a scoping study on the creation of an independent environmental protection agency. The Assembly recently debated and passed a motion declaring a climate emergency. In the coming Budget year, the Environment Minister must use his budget to deliver, as a matter of urgency, an environmental protection agency and a comprehensive climate change Act.

Mr Muir: I thank the Finance Minister for his statement and the Committee Chairpersons for their contributions. I speak today as the Alliance spokesperson for finance. I have been an MLA for nine weeks, and it has been a bit of a crash course in public finances to try to understand everything that is happening here, but I will give it a go.

It should be noted that today is the first time in this mandate that the Assembly is debating a motion and forthcoming legislation concerning finances and budgets. Since early 2017, civil servants have stepped into the breach. Along with the odd bit of legislation from the Secretary of State, it has largely been civil servants who kept the show on the road. I want to put on record my thanks to the civil servants for the service that they have given to ensure that government limped along without Ministers in place. They were left in a very difficult position, and we should all be thankful for the service that they gave over the last three years.

We are where we are now. The Assembly has been restored, and we are, in effect, today being asked to give retrospective approval to in-year movements via the spring Supplementary Estimates. That is the first element that I will talk about, and my party will vote for it.

I welcome the new approach that has been taken to monitoring rounds, compared with the previous mandate, when departmental bids were not published. That inhibited the Assembly and relevant Committees in their scrutiny role. I seek assurance from the Minister that that new approach will be the norm for the rest of the mandate, because it is important that full scrutiny is given to the monitoring rounds and that, when we are giving an overview of the spring Supplementary Estimates, we have a process that is open and transparent.

As we know, many key services have often been reliant on the hope of monitoring rounds. The recent monitoring round provided funding for a number of services, but it is no way for services to be delivered whereby they are waiting on monitoring rounds to be able to continue. Essentially, some services in Northern Ireland are being delivered on a wing and a prayer, and we cannot continue like that. Monitoring rounds should not be used as the only stopgap to ensure that services continue to be delivered.

Monitoring rounds were used to help towards the resolution of pay parity in the health service and to avert further nurses' strikes. I welcome that that money was found as part of the monitoring rounds to help towards that resolution, but we should not kid ourselves that there are not other public pay issues to be resolved, especially teachers' pay. Whilst the monitoring round was useful in

providing a resolution to the nurses' pay, we should be cognisant that there are many other challenges ahead.

In the weeks running up to the restoration of these institutions, a number of strikes were taking place on behalf of nurses, and, as I said, the monitoring rounds were able to help towards the resolution of those strike actions. It was a damning indictment of the Assembly, and of politics generally, that the Health and Social Care system was experiencing those strikes and that public services were allowed to deteriorate to such a level. There is an opportunity today and in the weeks, months and years ahead, or whatever time is left in this mandate, to rectify that situation and give confidence to people because never again should we see the situation whereby nurses feel it necessary to strike. That was a disgrace and something we should all be ashamed of.

Members will note that the Vote on Account document is very short and that the legislation is, in effect, just about keeping the show on the road and providing funding to allow the continued delivery of services. As the Minister stated, the real debate will come when the Budget is presented. That is when the difficult and challenging decisions need to be made not only by the Finance Department but by Ministers, the Executive and the Assembly. We all know that there is the potential of Barnett consequentials, but they are unknown as the UK Budget is due to be delivered by whoever is the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 March. We must proceed now to keep public finances operating in Northern Ireland and ensure that rates bills are issued.

I also note that the Barnett consequentials that are likely to arise will largely be as a result of a splurge to overshadow the turmoil likely to ensue as a result of Brexit if the Prime Minister is intent on continuing his current negotiating strategy. Whether such funding commitments will be able to continue in the years ahead is unclear. Whilst we may get Barnett consequentials, especially in capital, the fact that this may continue over the rest of this mandate is not certain.

Regardless of whatever Barnett consequentials we are likely to receive, the challenges in the next financial year and beyond are going to be significant and should not be underplayed by anyone. The additional revenue and capital moneys will not meet all the funding pressures that have been reported in Committees, the Chamber and the media. There are many.

Whilst we need to look at revenue raising, the first place we should always look as a default should be our expenditure. The Alliance Party is on record saying that the cost of division needs to be tackled and the savings delivered. We cannot just keep saying no to the difficult decisions, such as a single teacher training college. That may have been ruled out previously, but we need to come back to it. We need to come back, look at these issues and take the difficult decisions. I will expand on this tomorrow in the Budget Bill debate, but if we are real about wanting to protect front-line services, we must face up to and tackle the cost of division.

The independent review of education provision is essential as part of that. It needs to deliver, and promptly, and we have to take the difficult decisions. The additional costs as a result of our segregated education system have to be addressed. We cannot keep kicking the can down the road.

On health services, my colleague Paula Bradshaw will outline later that all parties signed up to Bengoa. We need to oversee the delivery of the outworkings of Bengoa to ensure better outcomes for patients. Reform of the health service is essential — it should be funded — but we also need to face up to the fact that health service inflation is running at between 6% and 8%. There are difficult decisions to be made.

3.45 pm

In addition to finance, my portfolio includes infrastructure, the significant pressures on which were reported last week. I declare that I am a former employee of Translink. Translink's funding position and the worries about whether it can continue as a going concern have to be addressed. We cannot legitimately declare a climate emergency, as we did a number of weeks ago, and then stand here and talk about decimating our public services and transport provision, particularly Ulsterbus, given its rural services. The official was quite open in Committee about the fact that one of the plans is to stop those services and close down Northern Ireland Railways. We have to address that issue.

We also have to address issues such as roads maintenance. The cost paid out to claims, reported in the media in recent days, cannot continue. We also need to ensure that we are investing in infrastructure, particularly west of the Bann. The regional imbalance has to be addressed. We have to be able to move forward as a region, and include all parts within it.

The need for investment in Northern Ireland Water's infrastructure has been well reported. We cannot continually put our head in the sand and not discuss how to resolve that. An open and honest discussion is needed about financing options for Northern Ireland Water. Mutualisation needs to be discussed. That is all before we consider the commitments made in New Decade, New Approach. I and my party are on the record as saying that the UK Government need to stand up and make their —.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, if we raise revenue to fund those antiquated systems as they are, the money will be wasted and go down the drain? Reform must take place.

Mr Muir: Thank you very much for the intervention. I agree with you. We have to show to the public that we are good custodians of public finances. We cannot legitimately go around asking for additional revenue-raising powers if we are not giving confidence to taxpayers that we are spending their money sensibly. We have not been able to do that to date.

The spirit of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document needs to be respected by not only the UK Government but the parties represented in the Chamber. There must be new attitudes to public finances and to taking difficult decisions, which, as I acknowledged, we have not done in the past. I look forward to seeing the Finance Minister's Budget and to all Ministers stepping up to the plate. The Alliance Party is content to support the motion.

Mr Frew: It is a privilege to follow Mr Muir, a lot of whose comments I agree with. I applaud him for his words. We are in a very unusual position. We are in a position in which we have stretched the integrity of the Finance Committee to the point at which it has to show contentment that it has scrutinised the process, when, in fact, none of

us has. I applaud the Departments that furnished each Committee with their bids and details around finance. The Finance Committee received that information, but we have not had time to scrutinise the detail in the way in which we should. There is a great fear that, although we are all back in the Chamber, it will be business as usual. Business as usual will just not cut it any more. We need to see change and decisions being taken that will positively impact on the people of Northern Ireland. Why are we in this unusual position and what should happen? We are in this unusual position because of three years in which we were not able to do our job. Those three years cost the people of Northern Ireland a lot of money. Worse than that, in September 2017, the then Finance Minister refused and failed to bring forward a Budget that could then go out to public consultation. That Budget never appeared. When all the Committees were screaming for budgets to compare and contrast with the draft Programme for Government at that time, that Budget never came forward. The following months were September, October, November and December, and in January this place finally crashed. Was a Budget ever going to be delivered by the previous Finance Minister? I doubt it. That has left us in dire straits and has left our Departments in dire straits, and it left the responsibility to the NIO — the unaccountable NIO — and the unaccountable Secretary of State to make budget decisions for the devolved Assembly because a Finance Minister could not, would not and did not bring forward a Budget to this place to help furnish the funding that the people desperately needed.

What should take place? We should actually see the Budget workings from the Finance Department from April/June of any given year for the next financial year. That should be worked on over the summer period and should then go out in draft form in September to be consulted upon. Then, in December/January, we would be faced with a Budget that could be prepared to go forward months in advance of when it is actually needed. However, we are now in this weird situation where we are debating financial transactions that have already taken place. Worse than that, we have 318 pages of detail on decisions that have already been taken, but we have three pages of detail on the 45% of moneys still to be spent in the Vote on Account. It is unacceptable that this Chamber has been furnished with three pages. Do not get me wrong, the detail is at the Committee, and the Committees have furnished the Finance Committee, but, unless you are privileged to be on the Finance Committee, this collective Chamber will not have full sight of that, and that is a fundamental problem for debating and scrutinising and being accountable to the people who elect us to do a job. Three pages for 45% of the annual budget for Northern Ireland — billions of pounds.

I said that we cannot get back to the way it was or to business as usual and that there has to be a sea change. We need an era of decisionism. I have said this before in this Chamber: we need a period when decisions will be taken for the benefit of our people. Mr Muir talked about cans being kicked down the road. I see along the horizon and it feels like there has been a kerbie bin cowped from the last named storm and all the cans are flying about all over the place because we have so many of them to pick up. When are we going to start?

We must ask ourselves four fundamental questions. What must we do? What must the Executive do to make this place better for the population of Northern Ireland? Within

that, there are two questions. Can we afford it? Can we afford not to do it? Then there is the hardest question of all, which we have probably never got answered. I have been an MLA for 10 years and I have never really had this answered. Where are we getting the money from? It is not good enough to complain that we are not getting enough money from the Exchequer. That will be an eternal truth that we will always have to deal with. It is not good enough either to say that we should have the courage to raise revenue ourselves, because I will tell you now: the way this place has performed, I would not like to see us getting more revenue-raising powers. What we need is reform, and only then should we consider raising revenue. If we take more hard-earned cash from our population to put into faltering systems that are antiquated and are no good to us, it will be like a household hearing that there is a hosepipe ban and deciding to fill the bath, but forgetting to put the plug into the plughole. That is how bad it would be, how ridiculous it would be, for us to even suggest revenue-raising powers or more powers being devolved. That is a nonsense and we should not be in that space. We have not functioned properly in this place, and even when we were functioning, we did not make the hard decisions that needed to be made.

Look at it right across the board. It is not only about the money that we get but the money that we could have. Look at the money that we are not spending on financial transactions capital. Look at the money that is not coming here that could be. Look at the debacle around RHI and the Northern Ireland (Regional Rates and Energy) Act and the money that we cannot draw down, the money that businesses cannot draw down to heat their premises and the money that is left sitting there. Those are decisions that we will have to tackle sooner rather than later for the benefit of our people.

I do not want to see business as usual in this place; I want to see a change. I want to see an era of decisionism like we have never had before, because our people deserve it. It is not good enough. It is not good enough that we would send the Finance Minister to the Exchequer to protest and try to get more money out of the British Exchequer. Of course, that is part of the job, but the introduction for the Department of Finance in the 'Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-20' document states:

"The aim of the Department of Finance is to help the Executive secure the most appropriate and effective use of resources and services for the benefit of the community and deliver quality, cost effective, efficient public services and administration in the department's areas of executive responsibility."

Can the Minister say that that has happened under his watch? I know that he is only into his post, but the previous Finance Minister could not even bring a Budget to the House. There were months of delay, and, eventually, the place fell without a Budget in place. What way is that to treat the people of Northern Ireland? What way is that to treat the House that represents the people of Northern Ireland and the Committees that are meant to scrutinise the work of all Departments? We could not even find a Budget to put on top of a Programme for Government to populate those outcomes and indicators.

We have a shameful legacy in this place, whereby Ministers did not stand up to their responsibilities and ran away from

the difficulties of this place. I say, "No more of that". It is not business as usual. It is time that this regional Assembly stood up for itself and started to make the tough decisions that are required to make our people's lives better.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Mr Maolíosa McHugh. This is the Member's maiden speech, and I ask that he be allowed to deliver it without interruption.

Mr McHugh: I am also a Member of the Finance Committee, and that was a wee bit like a re-run of the discussions that we had only last week. I am a wee bit disappointed in that, because the Committee took the decision to facilitate the accelerated continuation of the Bill. As I said, much of that was a re-run.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the debate that has taken place today. I was very impressed by how knowledgeable each and every Member who spoke seemed to be about the implications for their Departments or sections. They were quite capable of quoting figures and numbers of what was required in the coming year.

Something that was also impressed on me was an element of a common denominator in each contribution. Just as they would identify priorities in their own areas, Members also acknowledged that we have a finite Budget and that resources are not there to meet all the requirements that they might have in their areas. What is the common denominator in that respect? It is the fact that we are dealing with austerity. That austerity not only exists now but has been a constant feature over the last number of years and has impacted on the budgets of each and every Department in the North of Ireland. It was in existence long before I came to the House.

Austerity is not like a new disease or something; it is a man-made feature that was implemented by the Tory Government. They continue to implement that same austerity agenda when it comes to the financing of the affairs of the North of Ireland.

4.00 pm

The new agreement has highlighted that, once more, the Tory Government have displayed duplicity. We, as MLAs, have come under attack in the media. Each and every morning, all you have to do is turn on the radio to hear Nolan or the like giving out about the different parties here in the North of Ireland and asking, "How is it that you signed up to an agreement without them including the budget in it?". Rather than criticising the MLAs for the commitment that they gave to the restoration of government in the North of Ireland, their attention should be concentrated on the people who are being duplicitous; they are the ones who have not delivered the budget that we require. On top of all that, Brexit will impose more constraints on us as we go down the line.

We hope that, when our Minister makes his journey to the Treasury, he will be able to maximise returns to allow us to deliver many of the programmes that we hope to deliver here for the people. Fiscal powers have been mentioned. Some do not have the confidence that we would be able to take on board new fiscal powers to raise revenue, but we would be quite capable of that. We should look to London to devolve those powers to the Assembly in the North of Ireland so that we can take greater control of the economy of the North. In saying all that, am I confident that, even then, we can, in any way at all, become a lot more

successful in reaching all our objectives? It is very difficult to see how that can happen unless the British Government take on board the responsibility that they have towards the citizens of the North of Ireland and help them in every way to ensure that they have the resources to meet the requirements of the new agenda that has been established by all of the parties here.

Mr O'Toole: "Thank you" to the Finance Minister for taking us through the spring Supplementary Estimates for 2019-2020. I welcome the fact that he and the Department have been able to deliver the Supplementary Estimates in such a timely and quick manner following the institutions being restarted. This is my first opportunity to speak in detail in the Chamber as my party's finance spokesperson. As was the case for two colleagues who spoke, I am a member of the Finance Committee. We have had some really interesting sessions over the past few weeks.

Today is also the first time that anyone has had the opportunity to debate in the Chamber the details of Northern Ireland's devolved spending priorities for nearly three years. Today, we are debating the spring Supplementary Estimates, which are, in a sense, the final update on spending for the financial year 2019-2020, and the Vote on Account for 2020-21, which enables spending plans to continue for the first few months of the next financial year. The first thing to say is slightly self-evident: it is a good thing that we are here debating the Supplementary Estimates, scrutinising allocations and adjustments across Departments and arm's-length bodies. For the past three years, civil servants have been placed in the uncomfortable and democratically unacceptable position of having to spend money with barely any political oversight or scrutiny. That situation is even more bizarre when one considers that the primary reason that the devolved institutions fell three years ago was that public money was spent so badly. Budget controls failed spectacularly, and Ministers and civil servants failed to react quickly enough to a spiralling budget crisis. The remarkable reaction of our political class to that catastrophic failure in spending control was to stop doing any scrutiny of spending for the past three years, so it is good that we are here now, scrutinising spending. It is far from ideal, as the two previous contributors mentioned, that we have to do it in such a compressed time. Tomorrow, the Finance Committee will be asked to grant accelerated passage to the Budget Bill, having had barely any time to consider that enormous Bill in detail. While we know that that Bill is not necessarily a long-term programme of agreed Executive financial priorities, it is still very detailed and important legislation that we have not had much time — or, really, any time at all — to scrutinise in detail. I agree with the sentiments of Mr Frew, who is vice chair of our Committee, and those of the Committee Chair earlier on that issue.

In normal times, spring Supplementary Estimates should be uneventful updates to the Assembly on in-year spending changes, but we are clearly not in ordinary times. The financial circumstances in which the re-established Executive are working are extremely straitened. We all know about the acute funding pressures across our public services, and various Members today have outlined what those are. The previous Alliance Party Member to speak gave the example of Translink and the acute pressure it faces; indeed, the indication from senior departmental officials is that there is a funding crisis in our public

transport system, but that also goes for health and any number of areas of our public services. Although it is good that we are here scrutinising those acute spending pressures, we are in an exceptional position.

In the January monitoring round, £36 million in resource spending and just under £6 million in capital spending were reallocated to meet some but far from all of the most immediate spending pressures. Last Monday, ahead of the laying of these Estimates, a last-minute update from the Treasury, just weeks away from the end of the financial year, led to a sudden £18 million uplift in resource spending to be allocated before the end of the financial year, and the Finance Minister updated us on where that money was going. However, that announcement had a sting in the tail: a £52 million reduction in our capital allocation. That reduction has been deferred until next year, in a sense understandably, by the Finance Minister, partly because the nature of capital spending means that it is hard to reallocate at short notice. Also, the deferring of that cut in capital spending — that reallocation — was because we presume and the Department hopes that the UK Budget in a few weeks' time will generate new capital resources for Northern Ireland that will absorb the £50 million that the Treasury has just taken away at the last minute. It is worth pausing and considering that. The Minister will be in London to meet the Treasury later this week. Even if we get the "expected splurge", to use Andrew Muir's words, on capital spending, we will still, presumably, start from a lower baseline because of the Treasury adjustment that we were told about at the very last minute. I am sure that the Minister will be remonstrating with the Treasury, and, as a former Treasury official, I urge him to do so in the strongest possible terms.

The Supplementary Estimates also include for 2019-2020 what looks like a significant underspend in capital DEL, with £93 million of unallocated DEL capital not being spent. That is far above the cap in the so-called budget exchange scheme that allows Northern Ireland to carry forward up to 3% of capital underspends in any given year. When one adds on the £52 million via the negative Barnett consequential that I just mentioned — the one that the Treasury forced on us at the last minute — you get to around 10% of Northern Ireland's entire annual capital budget. As part of that, we have more than £150 million in financial transactions capital spending that we handed back to the Treasury because our Departments simply cannot find ways of getting that money out the door. I say that, acknowledging the fact that there are specific issues with housing associations that the Chair of the Communities Committee referred to. Given the urgent need for capital investment in our public services, every party in the Chamber and probably every Member in the Assembly agrees that we simply cannot accept a situation where resources are being handed back to the Treasury. People lost trust in the Assembly and the Executive three years ago because of a culture that allowed people to burn woodchips in order to make money that would otherwise be "lost to Northern Ireland". That was the wrong attitude; that was resource spending. Handing back money that is specifically designated for capital investment is a loss to Northern Ireland, and we need to do better, our officials need to do better and people across our public services need to do better at spending the money when it is allocated. Tomorrow, we will have an opportunity to talk about priorities for the next year. Hopefully, that will include

a much-improved and more transparent Budget process. I am glad that the Minister has confirmed that he will shortly present, following discussions with Executive colleagues and once he has seen the outline of the UK Budget on 11 March, a full Budget.

Today, we get to vote on a Supply resolution, both for the first few months of the next financial year and confirming, in a sense, money that has already been spent in the last financial year. Voting on Supply resolutions — giving authority for the spending of public money — is one of the most fundamental acts of any legislature. As we know, politics in London and Dublin has been characterised in the past years by the presence of what are known as “supply and confidence” arrangements, so it is to be welcomed that Stormont is back fulfilling the most basic act of authorising the supply of public money. My party will support the motions today, but, after the past three years and with an eye on the Coghlin report in just a couple of weeks, we have much more work to do to ensure that we have the confidence of the people on whose behalf we spend this money.

Mr Storey: As I contribute to this afternoon’s debate, I feel much more relieved and under less pressure than I did in 2016, when I sat in the House as Finance Minister. My colleague from North Antrim has reminded us that, not many months after we brought a Budget through the House, the party that now has responsibility for the Department of Finance abdicated its responsibility and ran away from its duty. We have heard much over the last weeks and months about “Our commitment to public services” and how “We will work for the people whom we represent”. That party has been found wanting in that delivery. Let me give you an example. The current Finance Minister was the person responsible, so, if this is not the case, he can deny it, although he has had reason to deny a lot of things recently. Let us look at the mitigation of welfare reform, an issue that, we were told, was “really important to the people whom we represent, an issue of real concern”. When the deal was done to bring in mitigation measures, whom did Sinn Féin leave it up to to deliver? The Westminster Government: “Let us send it to London to the big bad Tories”, whom we heard a Member talk about, the people who were responsible for austerity. Why? Sinn Féin was not prepared to come to the House, put its hand up and vote for something. We welcome the fact that now, maybe, for a time, they have returned to the Chamber. They will go through the Lobbies, and they will vote for a Budget and for measures that were made in Northern Ireland. Maybe we can give a degree of comfort to the people of Northern Ireland that, for a period, we may have some progress. Some of us remain more sceptical than others.

As we come to what is before us today, there are issues that I would like the Finance Minister to address. I have no doubt that he has many officials in another part of the Building who are seeking to prepare responses for him. When it comes to, for example, the Department for Communities, when will we deal with the underspend on mitigation measures of at least £136 million, going by the last correspondence that I had with the then permanent secretary, in March 2016? There was much talk about how we needed to get the money to the people who were in need. The need did not transpire, and we have an underspend of over £136 million. No wonder the Treasury looks at this place and asks, “Why would we give you any

more money? You cannot manage the money that you have already been allocated”.

Then we come to the Housing Executive. When will the parties opposite, including the SDLP, grasp the issue? I am no financial expert, but the reality is that the Housing Executive, according to the Savills report on housing that we brought in, needs in the region of £6 billion over the next number of years.

Where is that money coming from? Are we just going to go to the Treasury again and say, “Please give us more”, when we are unprepared to change the financial structure that deals with how the Housing Executive can spend money?

4.15 pm

Mr McCrossan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr McCrossan: I am listening to the Member and am fascinated by his remarks. Surely the Member will recognise the phrase “high horse” about the statements being made when you consider the spending and lack of budgeting in the past in RHI and Red Sky by his party’s Ministers.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for reminding us. Wherever irregular spend happens, I am quite happy to call it out. In fact, I remind the Member that, when I was the Finance Minister, I was the Minister who contacted the Comptroller and Auditor General about the irregular spend in RHI, so none of us are running away from our responsibilities. We are facing up to our responsibilities in the House.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that if you keep adding a wish list of projects and red lines into the fiscal system without having a clear pathway to find the money, that truly makes us a basket case, and then, of course, Westminster takes the attitude that it does?

Mr Storey: We could depend only on our own opinion on these things, and we all have biases and all come with a particular political view, but I do not think that anybody would argue with the Northern Ireland auditor. Let us remember that there have been three Northern Ireland audits on issues in relation to spend, but not on what we are going to spend. Sometimes we are accused in the House of not making decisions. Decisions were made about certain spend. The last Comptroller and Auditor General’s report made it abundantly clear that there is £700 million. Do we get that figure in the House today? It is £700 million not as a result of some botched boiler scheme but because of total and absolute inadequacy in the system to deliver on the decisions made in the House. Let us remember what Mr Donnelly said about how we spend our money:

“Existing, cumbersome governance and delivery structures within the Northern Ireland public sector can be a barrier to achieving value for money. I believe there is merit in considering alternative models, sufficiently resourced with specialist staff, to help improve future delivery.”

That was not in 2016. That was not in 2017. That was in 2019. There are two other reports that he gave his financial assessment on. One was on the Education Authority, and the other was on the voluntary exit scheme.

There is an interesting one. Let us remember that we, in good faith, embarked on a process to rebalance the economy. It seems as though that phrase has now disappeared. It seems as though there is little interest now in us addressing that. It is still there. What was it that we did? We let almost 4,500 people leave the Civil Service, and what did it cost us? It cost £170 million. I ask the Finance Minister to undertake a piece of work to determine to ensure that no one has been returned to the system as a result of the exit scheme, as I believe there has been.

The House and the decisions that we make in the House are sometimes taken as though, "Well, sure, you can have a swipe at the politicians", and we are up for it, but, as the Comptroller and Auditor General said, we need change to how we do our business.

Mr McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr McCann: Just listening to you makes me think that I am in a different place, because I remember when you were Minister and we had debates and arguments about welfare. It was your party that tried to stop welfare reform at the start. It was this party that argued the pace and, as a matter of fact, got close to walking away from this place because of the impact that it would have on people out there. When you talk about the Westminster element, you know quite well that there was a technicality that had to be met. If it had not been met, the thing would not have gone through. The other thing is —

Mr Allister: The other thing is Connolly House.

Mr McCann: I expect that from you. I did not expect it from Mervyn.

Again, when you were Minister, and we were talking and arguing about giving powers back to councils, your party, along with another Member, put forward a proposal that we remove all mentions of need, and that stopped crucial legislating powers going to councils. He can get up —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind the Member that interventions should be brief.

Mr McCann: I will finish there.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his intervention. My time spent as Minister, in either the Department for Social Development or the Department of Finance and Personnel, should prove that need is something about which I genuinely have a concern. When I visited the Member's constituency with him, he will remember that I saw housing conditions in West Belfast that were abysmal. Let us remember that, in meeting need, we have to have the right structures in place. What I am imploring the Finance Minister to do is to ensure that the way in which the money is not only allocated but spent —

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

Mr Storey: — gives us delivery, because, as the Comptroller and Auditor General clearly indicated in his most up-to-date report, that has failed to date, with £700 million being the amount of underspend.

Ms Dolan: I will make my very short contribution as a member of the Finance Committee and as Sinn Féin spokesperson on workers' rights. The 'New Decade, New

Approach' document included the banning of zero-hour contracts, devolving minimum-wage powers and making the Executive a living-wage employer. Those commitments signalled additional investment after a decade of Tory austerity.

Tory austerity was imposed on us against our will. Tory austerity has had a devastating impact on departmental budgets and public services. Members will be well aware of ongoing Civil Service pay disputes. Those have been caused by Departments being unable to award civil servants the necessary pay increases to improve their living standards. The very fact that the lowest-paid civil servants had to get a 3% pay increase because they could not legally be paid beneath the national minimum wage highlights the extent of the effect that austerity has had on our workers.

Until austerity is lifted and Departments receive a cash injection from the British Treasury, they will continue to struggle financially and will be unable to resolve ongoing pay issues. Our role in the Assembly is to challenge austerity and to mitigate, as far as possible, the pressures that result from cuts and underfunding that have been imposed on us. The challenges that those financial pressures present are not abstract or academic. They affect people in their day-to-day life in immediate ways in the areas of health, the education of our children and the impact on our environment. We need decent jobs that value workers and protect their rights. We need to improve our competitiveness through investing in our public services and infrastructure. Our job as political representatives is to make a difference in the longer term through managed political change on this island, but it is also to improve the lives and prospects of ordinary working families.

In that context, I welcome the Finance Minister's commitment to continued engagement with trade union colleagues. I am committed to continuing to work with all Ministers to be a voice for workers' rights.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind Members to connect their speech to the spring Supplementary Estimates or the Vote on Account. Those are what we are debating today.

Mrs Barton: I welcome the opportunity to address some of the budgetary issues in the spring Supplementary Estimates, particularly for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, for which I am party spokesperson.

It is interesting to note that the overall financial trend from the present net provision in DAERA is downwards. There are reduced budgets for flood prevention, farming, veterinary services, animal health, the environment, the marine environment, fisheries and forestry. The only significant budgetary increase is going to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. It is unusual that areas in which we assume there should be attempts made to improve and increase input, such as forestry, animal health and the environment, are all on reduced budgets.

The Department has a very high staffing level in its resource costs, with 71% of the departmental budget going on staffing. While I fully understand the need for staff and the work they carry out, as they are largely a front-line service, it is vital that the level of staffing undergoes a detailed review, including assessments made on the

balance of staff between senior management and those in the front line.

I note that the Department of Finance approved the business case for the expenditure of £44 million of capital and £27 million resource for a DAERA digital transformation programme. While I support progress towards online services, it needs to be carried out in conjunction with more widespread improvements on delivering rural high-speed broadband. There are a significant number of areas in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone — I am sure, in many others as well — where broadband speeds are very poor and, in some cases, there is no broadband accessibility or even mobile phone signal. It is unfair to expect the rural community, and particularly farm businesses, to manage by digital methods if the core infrastructure is not available. It is like expecting to travel to London at short notice from Northern Ireland, but all the airports are closed.

It is vital that the agricultural economy has stability as Brexit continues to be implemented. There is a major onus on the Northern Ireland Executive to be proactive and robust in any negotiations or discussions with either the UK or the EU about the future of the Northern Ireland agri-food economy. People here expect and deserve nothing less.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. As someone involved in agriculture, I understand the importance attached to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the many aspects of its work and remit in managing agriculture in Northern Ireland. This is not a small Department, and DAERA has a staff base of over 3,000 people in over 70 locations. In budgetary impact, staff costs associated with the Department run to some £146 million. That amounts to 71% of the total budget available to the Department. That covers every aspect of the running of the Department, and it represents a significant slice of the pie.

With this in mind, resources are important. The way in which they are spent must take into account the complexity of agriculture and rural affairs, and the requirements of the many directives and rules that must be navigated. I am on record previously as praising the Department on the advancements in payment and processing structures for basic farm payments. Important improvements have been made in recent times which have enabled almost all payments to be made on time. That is down to good management and important changes in processing methods. It is good stewardship of departmental resources, and it shows how efficiencies can be delivered that can deliver gains for the agricultural industry.

Digital transformation is a vital aspect of driving down the cost of government administration in the future and also making processes easier for farmers. It has been noted in recent Committee hearings that the Department is on track to move 125,000 transactions annually from paper-based to digital, and 150,000 transactions from phone to digital platforms this year. With this transformation in mind, and the fact that online and digital technologies are faster and less cumbersome, this should also result in efficiencies and savings within the Department that can be utilised for all its important work. We have been briefed at Committee on estates and assets, and there is importance attached to ensuring that properties and assets are used to their maximum potential. Areas where savings can be made by restructuring or offloading should be fully assessed, and

reasonable opportunities taken to make DAERA's estates operations as efficient as possible.

One of the most pressing issues of the day, and of particular importance to DAERA, is the outworkings of Brexit. It is important that the Department has the right level of resources to deal effectively with important changes that will come and be able to respond to the new realities and challenges.

I believe that opportunities will come from being freed from the fetters of the European Union. I welcome the recent finance package as we move away from the EU-based payments; the fact that payments will be based on the September 2019 exchange rate; and the fact that payments will be made on time, which will be of significance to everyone in the industry. Important work will, of course, be undertaken in reaching an effective replacement system, and that will require adequate resources.

4.30 pm

Climate change is another important area that will require action and adequate resourcing. It will also require capital funding from within DAERA's remit to support farmers in making further moves towards low-emission methods. As farmers will know, rules and regulations are already stringent on ensuring that best care is taken of the environment. For further steps forward, it is vital that farmers are assisted financially.

A key theme in the coming months will be the ability to respond to fast-paced change. The Department must set out its stall with that firmly in mind in order to respond to change, as I have said, and make the most of opportunities. Agriculture is vital to the Northern Ireland economy. I encourage the Minister and the Executive to protect its interests at home and abroad.

Ms Anderson: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh ráiteas an Aire Airgeadais ar an bhuiséad. I thank the Minister for his statement and the comments regarding the Budget and the spring Supplementary Estimates. Minister, you referred to austerity and Brexit and the impact of both on the Executive Budget as well as on the spring Supplementary Estimates: do you agree with the comments that Mike Nesbitt made regarding the tools you need to strengthen the economy — I agree with Mike on that — and the need for prosperity? The corollary of that is twofold. In the first instance, we need to end the British Government-imposed austerity, and I will return to the other later. Even in the context of the spring Supplementary Estimates, we have to take account of what austerity has done over the past nine years, nine years of deepening inequality; nine years of deepening poverty; nine years of poor health and schools struggling; and nine years of families and workers struggling. All of that is very much compounded for those of us who live in the north-west, because, on top of everything else that I have listed, there have been nine years of deepening regional inequality in such places as Derry. People in the north-west and across the North rightly demand that the Executive address such regional inequalities. They look to the New Decade, New Approach outline Programme for Government, which commits resources to be allocated on the basis of objective need.

We are dealing with the spring Supplementary Estimates and what Departments are trying to do. I listened to Chris

Lyttle talk about the need for radical change in how we do things. He focused on education and the impact of budget deficits and bailouts. I want to widen that out, but, before doing so, let me recall what Robin Newton said about the importance of educational achievement. Of course, we do not want to see the British budgetary cuts result in children underachieving in school, regardless of whether they come from one tradition or another: boys or girls, Catholic, Protestant or neither. It would be remiss of me not to point out that, whilst Mr Newton was right in saying that the percentage of Protestant boys underachieving in education is the highest — too high; none of us want anything other than that to be addressed — numerically, more Catholic boys are not achieving five GCSEs or more; indeed, the latest data shows that 919 Catholic boys underachieved compared with 565 Protestant boys. Both should be highlighted when we express concerns about children underachieving, regardless of which tradition they come from and regardless of whether they are Protestant or Catholic or have another denomination or none, as the case may be.

I go back to what Chris said about the need for radical change. That takes me to the second point that I want to raise. Given that you are going to London, to the British Treasury, to make a case for them to end the damaging cuts and the damage and harm that they are doing to schools, hospitals, workers, social care — the list is endless, and you have heard a lot about it here today — have you, Minister, looked at the excellent report done by the Vancouver university on mapping the economic benefits of Irish unity, especially in the context of the damage that Brexit will do to the economy in the North on top of imposed austerity? Will you reflect on what Declan McAleer said when he outlined the damage that the British-imposed point-based immigration system will have on the North? He was addressing that in the context of the spring Supplementary Estimates.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Anderson: No, I will not give way.

He talked about new nationals feeling unwanted and unwelcome and now unprotected. All of that points to an economy in the North going from bad to worse, making your job, with reduced finances and limited tools to address it, all the more difficult.

When I reflect on Derry and Donegal — the place where I live — and the places along the partitioned part of Ireland that will suffer most from Brexit, as they have done from the British-imposed cuts, I see that there is a better way and an alternative to the block grant through the economics of reunification, with the development of the work under way on planning and preparing for constitutional change in Ireland. Minister, reports such as the Hübner report, undertaken by the Vancouver university, would be worth exploring. Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir. Thank you all for listening.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I plead again with Members to keep to the Vote on Account and the spring Supplementary Estimates. We are straying way beyond that.

Ms Bradshaw: I support the motions, and I will make my comments specifically on health spending. It is well known that funding a health and social care service that meets the needs of our ageing population is becoming increasingly and incredibly difficult. Every day, in the media, we see a

new story about the huge pressures on our system in terms of the workforce, the workload or the workplace. Before I reflect on those three areas in the spring Supplementary Estimates, I put on record my appreciation of the work of the civil servants with financial management responsibility during the three years of political impasse, be it through the Department of Health, the health and social care trusts or any of the arm's-length bodies.

At our Health Committee meeting on 13 February, we were advised that some measures had been put in place in this financial year to reduce costs. For example, the medicines optimisation programme will save £32 million in this year. However, I have no doubt that, at this stage, there is little fat left that can be trimmed.

If we look at the spring Supplementary Estimates — I refer to page 131 — in the context of workforce pressures, we see a downward movement in spending for the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency. I ask why that happened in this financial year. We know that there are huge pressures in training our staff, developing them and, most crucially, retaining them in Northern Ireland.

On the workload, the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs highlighted in its report last autumn the urgent need to address the huge pressure on our community pharmacists, not least because so many of them have left community pharmacy and moved into practice-based pharmacy. While the protracted contractual negotiation is still ongoing, about three years later, with the Department of Health, we see in the Estimates that there is a net change in provision, under the heading of “Family Health Service — Pharmaceutical Services”, of over £8 million. Again, how did that happen? I agree with my colleague Colm Gildernew, who chairs the Health Committee, that, while the report breaks it down into headings, we need more information on exactly what that money is being spent on in public services.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. She raises a valid point about community pharmacy. The report published, I think, in 2017 was for 2011, and the people who provide a very good service to our population have been cut adrift. They are trying to work with business plans that are so outdated it is unbelievable, yet that is one of the decisions that could be made that would help those people.

Ms Bradshaw: I totally agree, and we could bridge that gap with slightly over £20 million. That is not a lot, but it would make a big difference to the services that they provide in our communities.

Lastly, I want to look at workplace issues. One of the key recommendations in the Bengoa report and the resultant ‘Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together’ report was the establishment of multidisciplinary teams to support GP federations. That was a wonderful proposal, because mental health practitioners, physios and occupational therapists (OTs) would all be based in a primary care setting. That is great, but we have not seen a flow of funds to support the refurbishment or extension of GP practices. Again, the report showed that financial transactions capital was available — money that was allocated and available for loans, specifically for capital projects. However, millions of pounds are being sent back. My question is — I think that Paul Frew raised it as well — “Why is that money being returned? Why was there a gap in the conversation

between the Department of Finance and the Department of Health?”.

While I agree that a lot of these questions are not necessarily posed to the Finance Minister, who is here today, or even to the Health Minister, who has been in post only for a couple of months, we need to ensure that the changes that were promised in the New Decade, New Approach deal in how we do business here on the hill, especially around the Executive table, are realised quickly. At the heart of that, we must ensure that the funding received by the Civil Service is used not only effectively but efficiently. That is challenging, not least because of the long list of pressures that are queuing up to be met. However, while we need to stabilise our health service, which requires substantial funding, not least as regards reducing our scandalous waiting lists, we need to ensure that we deliver on that health transformation agenda. The next two years of this Assembly term will no doubt fly in, so we cannot delay the process any longer, not least through political populism or parochialism.

Ms S Bradley: As the SDLP’s spokesperson on health, I note that the Chairpersons of the Statutory Committees have rightly highlighted the pressures across their respective Departments and pointed out how this inadequate budgetary practice, compounded by the cost of political absence, has really factored into what is, essentially, little more — or less — than a holding position for most Departments. Like others, I can point out that the problems associated with non-recurrent funding pots, repeated dependency on in-year monitoring rounds to deliver on many basic front-line services, inability to utilise financial transactions capital and a lack of any real time for scrutiny are really not a good way to do business.

I want to refer to the spring Supplementary Estimates and look at what has happened. The Health Committee has been made acutely aware of the huge pressures across the health and social care system. Nobody knows that better than those outside this place who depend on those services. We have welcomed the Health Minister’s early efforts to address some of the pay issues in the system, but we recognise that that is not all. The SDLP is concerned about the sustainability of the financing, going forward.

The Committee also welcomed the funding announced to aid victims of the contaminated blood scandal. We urged the Health Minister to ensure that victims and their families or beneficiaries receive directly the full money that is due to them, as promised throughout the process.

4.45 pm

We urge the Executive to recognise that what begins as one Department’s pressure often emerges as a shared pressure. I note, for example, the positive feedback — it was mentioned often today and was highlighted to the Health Committee — on multidisciplinary teams, which Ms Bradshaw rightly pointed out.

That is an excellent model, and nothing but good reports have come to us following the pilot scheme. The aim is to wrap significant primary services around GP practices. The ambition to save time and funding via this method should not be lost. It is significant. Soundings suggest that we should aim to have this model in a town near you soon. However, let us consider the 100 towns and villages highlighted by the Chairperson of the Infrastructure

Committee, Miss McIlveen, that cannot currently connect to the sewerage and water systems, or the areas that do not have access to high-speed broadband. We cannot go into our silos. It is critical that each Department knows what is happening upstream in other Departments and whether that might be a severe impediment to the delivery of its ambitions. Promises were made to come out of silos, but we have never had real evidence of that. This is the time when, perhaps for the first time ever, we need to step out and do that. We urge that that is how future Budgets will be delivered. I look forward to working with colleagues across the House on what should be a longer-term and more sustainable offer for Northern Ireland.

Ms Armstrong: Today’s debate should be a non-event. We are debating something that should be a matter of process. However, as this refers to a Budget set by the Secretary of State, and given the fact that no Committees have thus far been able to scrutinise it or in-year monitoring rounds, we are, understandably, taking the opportunity to discuss our financial situation.

We are discussing the resolution that confirms this year’s detailed spending for each Department. We are also discussing the Vote on Account for 2020-21. We all know that this will allow existing services to continue in the early months of the new financial year, as the introduction in the paperwork that we received states:

“pending consideration of appropriate legislation to provide funds to meet the balance of estimated expenditure for that year.”

It is not next year’s Budget. It is just a glimpse of what we need to roll forward.

We are discussing this year’s money because the Budget for this financial year was set when the Assembly was not sitting. No MLAs had an opportunity to scrutinise this year’s Budget or in-year monitoring rounds. As a result, we are being asked to Vote on Account so that Departments do not run out of money.

I add my thanks to those expressed by other Members to the Civil Service, which carried Northern Ireland through the missing Assembly years. Thankfully, they kept the lights on and the wheels turning while there was an absence of responsibility. I thank the two largest parties for getting us back, but it took far too long.

If the Civil Service had not been enabled to continue to deliver services, I expect that Prime Minister Johnson’s Secretary of State would now be in control. Goodness knows what delights they could have imposed on us. Thank you to our civil servants, especially those whose names and faces are now known to the public. Our Civil Service normally remains in the background. However, due to the impasse, and whether it was intended or not, some civil servants were thrust into the spotlight.

Going back to the spring Estimates and the Vote on Account, as the Alliance spokesperson for Communities, I thank the Minister for sharing the details thus far, but I also raise significant concerns. Substantial, eye-watering amounts were surrendered by the Department for Communities: £38.8 million of DEL resource and £36.4 million of DEL capital. I am sure that, like me, the public will be shocked by the amount that it gave back, especially at a time when many people struggle to make ends meet. As we are all aware, the Department for Communities

is the place that is supposed to provide a fair system of financial help to those in need.

Much of the money that is being returned — £36.2 million — is from financial transactions capital. The Department cannot spend this money because of the classification of housing associations. This matter needs to be addressed as quickly as the welfare mitigations. I ask the Finance Minister to work with the Minister for Communities to bring forward the Housing (Amendment) Bill to reclassify housing associations urgently, as this will ensure that enough new homes can be built and that co-ownership remains an option and operational. If the Department for Communities is to enable access to decent, affordable, sustainable homes and housing support services, we need the legislation to enable this to happen as soon as possible.

Some of the resource money being given back by Communities relates to programmes that have not been taken up as well as they could have been; for example, the rates rebate programme. That money is available to help people pay their rates, but, because few people knew about it, they were not able to avail themselves of the support. The contingency fund provides emergency support for people, but, again, it is not being shared, and the communications on it have been quite poor. People have been offered an advance loan but were not made aware that there was an opportunity to access non-repayable moneys. If Committees had been in place, we would have had more time to scrutinise this and put it right in-year. We need to learn from this and ensure that appropriate messaging is used to enable the public to know what is available to them. I, therefore, urge the Minister to ensure that there is consultation before the next Budget. I appreciate that time is tight, but the Assembly is back. We each need, through our Committees, to ensure that the 2020-21 Budget is scrutinised and that, where there are allocations to support people, they are communicated quickly, spent appropriately and not surrendered.

The Department for Communities is supposed to provide a fair system of financial help to those in need, to tackle disadvantage and to promote social inclusion and economic equality. It cannot do so if part of its allocation is surrendered because it has not appropriately promoted programmes of support to the public or there are delays in the implementation of the legislation regarding the reclassification of social housing. Can the Minister confirm that appropriate consultation will be completed? I appreciate that we will hear from the Chancellor only on 11 March about how much Westminster will provide to Northern Ireland. I appreciate that the Vote on Account may give us breathing space, but it should also give us time for scrutiny.

Finally, I ask that you, as Finance Minister, address as a matter of urgency silo budgeting, which has just been mentioned by an SDLP colleague. This is the new approach. The Programme for Government is a new approach, yet we are still budgeting separately and looking after individual Department's interests. There are cross-cutting programmes that we need to fund across Departments. I ask that the Minister, if he can, bring forward as soon as possible what criteria he will expect Ministers to use to ensure that cross-departmental budgeting is taken forward.

Ms McLaughlin: The Minister will know that the Supplementary Estimates include the Department for

the Economy's proposals to promote a competitive, sustainable and inclusive economy to be delivered through investment in skills, infrastructure, research and business development. We need to begin by accepting and acknowledging that we have a problem. In doing so, we might be able to find and provide some solutions.

It is easy to walk around Belfast, see the cranes above you and believe that there is no problem, but for those communities in west Belfast and east Belfast where there is chronic unemployment and deprivation, there is a problem for the economy. It does not work for everyone. That is exactly the same in my constituency of Foyle. We have problems with unemployment, economic inactivity, low productivity and low wages. That means that, for many thousands of families, we do not have an economy that is competitive, sustainable or inclusive.

If we want to improve wages and business profits, we must raise productivity. The accountancy firm PwC says that the Republic of Ireland is around 60% more productive than Northern Ireland. Ulster University says that Great Britain is around 25% more productive than Northern Ireland. If you drill right down into that, you will find that the area that includes Derry city and Strabane has the lowest productivity in the whole of Northern Ireland. It is easy to understand why. For decades, we have had some of the worst transport infrastructure both on this island and throughout the UK. We do not have the skills that we need. There has to be more investment in skills at graduate level by not only increasing the flow through substantial expansion of the Magee campus but investing in apprenticeships and ensuring that every child leaves school with the skills that they need for their life and career.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Member for taking the intervention. I am sure that she will agree with me that, even where indigenous businesses have worked really hard to keep their businesses, such as in areas like my constituency of Mid Ulster, the infrastructure has not been put in place to support them. That needs to be addressed, because we are too focused on foreign direct investment.

Ms McLaughlin: Thank you for the intervention.

To meet all those challenges, investment is needed, and more investment than we have given to date. We also need to invest more in public transport to ease the gridlock in Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland, including Derry. Investing in public transport is another part of the solution to low productivity. Time spent in a traffic jam is not very productive. I urge the Executive and the Assembly to make tough decisions and to get moving on the efficiency measures that are needed to free up funds for investing in skills, infrastructure and public transport.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she accept that, without the necessary investment, particularly in our sewerage infrastructure, key elements such as housing, affordable housing, economic and industrial development, and, equally, councils' local development plans could be rendered nothing more than academic exercises?

Ms McLaughlin: The Member is absolutely correct.

We need to get moving on subregional targets for all our Departments and economic development agencies that are based on economic, social and political need and that

will drive and deliver a balanced regional economy that works for all. For once, we need to be courageous and do the right thing. If we fail to do this, we will be failing the current generation and future generations of workers, businesses and citizens.

Mr Allister: Debates such as this can sometimes be a bit dull — even boring — and so this one might have been. Then Ms Anderson came along and led us into the fantasy land of Irish unity. Did she even read the first resolution? As you go through it, you cannot be but struck by the eye-watering figures that keep this place going. You come to a resource figure of £21 billion. Where does Ms Anderson think that figure came from?

Mr Frew: Venezuela.

Mr Allister: Venezuela? Maybe. That figure came from the benighted, much-abused British Treasury. Of course, that is not the end of the story, because £21 billion is only the resource figure. To get the full spend in Northern Ireland, you have to add other things, such as the capital figure. Indeed, as an aside, I ask the Minister to remind us why we do not vote on the capital spend in the resolutions. You have to add the capital spend, the accruing resources and things that are obliquely but not emphatically referenced in the spring Supplementary Estimates document, such as state pensions and judicial salaries. I suggest that, when you do that, you come to an annual spend in Northern Ireland of somewhere in the order of £28 billion. Do not take it from me, however. I ask the Minister, in his reply, to tell us the total gross resource and gross capital spend in 2019-2020 in Northern Ireland, and then let me ask he who would have us in an all-Ireland republic how he would ever hope to raise that money.

Here we are in Northern Ireland with a working population of 800,000 people, and we are spending something like £28 billion. That is about £35,000 for every person who works in the Province. Is that the level of Venezuelan tax that we can expect in the utopia of a united Ireland?

It does not seem to worry Ms Anderson and, clearly, not the Minister, but that is the reality. That is the realpolitik. Is he truly saying to us that his precious Irish Republic could afford any of that? When you look at the state of the Irish Republic and its homelessness and housing crisis — all of those things — you ask, “How would they ever hope to pay for any of this?”. Of course, they would not.

Someone wanted to intervene.

5.00 pm

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Given the national debt of the Irish Republic and the utterances of its Prime Minister about the recalibrated amount of money that the Irish Republic will have to find to pay into Europe because of our withdrawal and Her Majesty's Government no longer giving a contribution, does the Member share my near-disappointment that the Member for Foyle would not take an intervention to explain, especially when she had four minutes and two seconds left? We do not need to hear from a university in Vancouver; we could have heard from the Member or, indeed, the Members across the way of the advantages to persuade us of a united Ireland. Sadly, there was no such giving way. Does the Member agree?

Mr Allister: I agree absolutely. Of course, we only need to look across the border. The Member mentioned national debt: the Irish Republic, per capita of population, has the third highest level of national debt in the developed world. That is the panacea for “spend, spend, spend” Sinn Féin, who never have enough and always want to grab more, and then they say that the answer lies in joining the half-bankrupt Irish Republic.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Oh, indeed.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member opens up the opportunity for a motion in the House that would allow us to have a proper debate and discussion on the benefits of an all-Ireland economy. I want to reassure him of one thing: we do not want to join 26 and six together to combine what have been all the mistakes of the two states to date. We want a new beginning, and we want the Member's involvement in that new beginning.

Perhaps the Member will answer this question: where does the British Treasury get all this money? It gets it from taxpayers. Do people here pay taxes? Of course they do. Do corporations here pay taxes? Of course they do. Do industries out there pay taxes? Of course they do. Where do all those taxes go? They go to the British Treasury. The question is what the economy will look like in the future, not what it looks like now.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I draw Members back to the motion that we are debating today: the motion on the Vote on Account and the Supplementary Estimates.

Mr Allister: Yes, in coming back to the motion, I remind you, Deputy Speaker, of the resource figure in the resolution: £21 billion. There it is in black and white.

The Member asks where all the money comes from, and I am glad that Sinn Féin is beginning to think about that; that is a novelty in its terms. Where does it come from? Yes, we all pay taxes. Yes, our corporations pay taxes, but they do not pay £28 billion a year in taxes. Let the Minister's strategic policy unit tell us what the estimated tax take is from Northern Ireland, and we will all find that it is far below the £28 billion that we spend. Where does the balance come from? It comes from the subvention, the subvention that Dublin could not make. My goodness, they are quaking about having to pay £2 billion to Brussels, and here we have a subvention of the order of £10 billion and more to Northern Ireland. It is such fantasy politics that only somebody of the calibre of Ms Anderson would even think that the debate should go there.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. Much ado has been made about Brexit and its potential impact. Does the Member think that it is interesting that, a few weeks ago in the House, we unanimously and collectively voted to withhold consent for the Brexit Bill? However, it was not all of us. As a Member of the European Parliament, Ms Anderson voted for the Brexit Bill. Will the Member tell us why he thinks that that logic does not correspond with the view of the House?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Members, I have indulged everyone quite enough. Can we come back to the motion that is being debated today?

Mr Allister: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be pleased to know that I could not possibly fathom or rationalise what Ms Anderson thinks.

There are other issues that I want to raise about the Estimates. In truth, I cannot do them justice, but I will speak tomorrow in the Budget debate and refer, if I may, to some of the technical issues in the document, particularly whether the issue pertaining to 'Managing Public Money' has been honoured, particularly Appendix A.2.5.15, which states that there is a limit of £1.5 million a year where you can rely:

"entirely on the authority of the Budget Act"

to list matters. In the document, there are matters as high as £400 million listed under the authority only of the Budget Act and the Estimates. There are questions that require answers, and I will pose those questions tomorrow.

Mr Carroll: I begin by saying that, obviously, public confidence in these institutions has been pretty low for some time. There is a general perception that Stormont is a gravy train where politicians simply turn up and take their wage for rubber-stamping legislation and where financial decisions are primarily drafted by unelected officials, advisers or spads; indeed, those concerns were right at the heart of the RHI debacle and the collapse of the previous Assembly. Overcoming that perception will be a test for the new Assembly. On the basis of the fact that we are being asked to approve the spring Supplementary Estimates today with nowhere near enough time for the appropriate scrutiny, it is hard to see how anything has changed. It is seriously concerning that such serious financial decisions — many of them retrospective — are being presented to the Chamber at such short notice, with little to no time for oversight or approval through the normal channels expected by the Assembly. It is not just concerning; it is incredibly frustrating. I have attempted to get clear answers from Committee Clerks, departmental officials and staff about the details of the spring Estimates, but I have been unable to get detailed answers in time. One member of staff rightly pointed out that officials should not be expected to respond with such detail at short notice. How, then, are MLAs expected to scrutinise and vote on important financial decisions with the shortest of notice? If the Estimates are voted through today, it will be with a clear and recognised lack of scrutiny and accountability. That, simply, is not good enough.

There appear to be some positives in the Estimates, with departmental increases to address pension payments, for example. Public services are, obviously, crying out for investment, and increases in public-sector spending should be welcomed. However, we are also asked to give blanket approval to a huge range of Estimates, the finer detail of which is not clear. Even a cursory glance shows some worrying financial movements, such as the decrease in DAERA spending of up to £24 million in cash resources and £10 million in net resource, which has been referred to. I find that extremely concerning at a time when we need to see investment to tackle issues such as the climate crisis. People Before Profit does not support such a reduction in DAERA spending.

I note that, during the Finance Committee meeting last week, one MLA had the good sense to ask for an explanation of the DAERA decrease, but no one was able to explain it to him; indeed, I have been trying to

ascertain that detail myself. No one has been able to explain it to me or my party staff in the short time afforded to us for scrutiny. I find it ludicrous, then, that the Finance Committee was told that it must approve the Estimates and that here we are, being asked to approve them in the Chamber. It would be reckless to do so. I appreciate that the Chair of the Finance Committee raised similar concerns about the level of scrutiny that has been possible. I also appreciate that there is a large backlog of work due to the unique situation that the Assembly finds itself in. However, the institutions have been sitting for some weeks, and more time should have been afforded to critically engage with the financial Estimates. It is a false choice to present an ultimatum that the Assembly must give blanket approval to the Estimates, which include cuts to DAERA, or trigger a disastrous situation in spending. I cannot sincerely give my approval by engaging in such a false choice, and I call for more time to be afforded for proper scrutiny.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I have finished.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call the Minister of Finance to make a winding-up speech. He has some 56 minutes of his allotted time remaining, should he wish to use them.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I just might. I am saving it for Jim Allister tomorrow; I will allocate him some time.

I thank all Members — I am not being facetious — for their contributions to the debate. I particularly welcome the contributions from the Chairs of the Committees, many of whom outlined the spending pressures that their departmental officials had briefed them on. I understand that from engagement with all the Ministers and their officials, and I welcome the valuable scrutiny role that the Committees will provide in relation to spending plans, not only for the retrospective approval and the Vote on Account to allow Departments to begin spending in the new financial year but for ongoing expenditure by the Departments.

I thank again the Finance Committee for agreeing to accelerated passage for the Bill that will be introduced later and debated tomorrow. I acknowledge that the in-year process has not followed the usual procedures this year, but I assure the Committee that they will be in place for the next financial year. Obviously, this Budget, as people have remarked on, was delivered by the Secretary of State — it was not our Budget — and the monitoring rounds up until the January monitoring round were done by the civil servants. I note that quite a few Members — almost exclusively from the Alliance Party — thanked the Civil Service for its contribution. On one of my first days in the Department, I acknowledged the contribution that the Civil Service had made over the three years in which the institutions were not functioning and the valuable contribution that the civil servants made at that time to keep issues ticking over.

There are a couple of points raised by Committee Chairs that I want to answer. As expected, quite a few people throughout the debate made points in relation to future spend and other arguments that are not necessarily part of the Estimates that we are dealing with today or the vote in relation to the expenditure for early in the new financial

year, but there were a couple of points on specifics that were raised, and I intend to try to address them.

The Chair of the Health Committee, Colm Gildernew, commented on the contaminated blood issue. The Executive allocated £1 million for that issue in the January monitoring, and, whilst £600,000 of that has been allocated, a further £400,000 remains unallocated. I have sought assurances from the Health Minister that all of the money allocated to his Department by the Executive for financial payments to those affected and infected by contaminated blood will be used for its intended purpose.

I noted the comments by the Education Committee Chair, Chris Lyttle, regarding a potential overspend of some £28 million by the Education Authority and the pressures on special educational needs. We have been able to prioritise education through additional in-year allocations of some £29 million. The Department of Education and the Education Authority must take every step to prevent an overspend in the 2019-2020 financial year. That said, we acknowledge the pressures facing Education, which many Members referred to, and that will have to be considered as part of the Budget-setting process for 2020-21.

Some Members advised that they would return to specific issues during tomorrow's debate, which I look forward to very much. I remind Members, as the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers did on a number of occasions today, that tomorrow's debate is still focused on the 2019-2020 financial year. Members will have every opportunity to debate next year's Budget when it is brought before the Assembly in the coming weeks.

As highlighted in the debate, this morning, the Executive agreed that their Budget — Mr Stalford managed to make the announcement before the Executive; I am not sure how he got that insider information, but there you go — for 2020-21 will be announced at the end of March. That allows a Budget to be set after our funding envelope is confirmed by the British Chancellor's Budget on 11 March.

Turning back to the focus of this debate: obviously, quite a number of Members made remarks.

Mike Nesbitt raised the old chestnut for unionism: the North/South Ministerial Council. When in doubt, wheel it out to ask why we are spending money on it. He talked about the car that was parked in the garage, but he ignored the much larger car that was paid for over the same period, which was, in fact, the Assembly, and in which he was a passenger because he was still getting paid. The North/South Ministerial Council, of course, had to keep the North/South arrangements in place over the past three years. The areas of cooperation and all the work continued in the North/South Ministerial Council in the same way as the Assembly process kept the Assembly ticking over in the past three years. That point has some validity, I suppose, coming from other Members, but your party agreed the North/South arrangements as part of the Good Friday Agreement.

5.15 pm

The Member also voiced his frustration about the delay in the delivery of the A5. I agree with some of his points but, as the Minister responsible for trying to get that road off the ground, I remember distinctly that the biggest political opposition came from the Ulster Unionist Party. He now is frustrated at the delay in delivering that. I assure him that

at no stage has the delay been caused by a failure to fund it. In the New Decade, New Approach agreement, the Irish Government have reaffirmed their £75 million commitment to the A5 project.

The Member raised a point about the office of cultural identity and asked how we could allocate funding when a business case had not been completed. I reassure him that we have not allocated any funding. What officials were talking about was their idea of an indicative budget for the office of identity, and it will fall to the Executive to consider that as part of their deliberation on Budget 2020-21. No public expenditure will be incurred without appropriate approvals in place.

With regard to the other priorities in New Decade, New Approach, as Members said, I will meet the Treasury on Thursday. I intend to raise the issue of funding for these priorities and, indeed, other priorities. I agree with him in that I want us to move to a prosperity culture rather than a dependency culture. I also agree with him when he spoke about my approach to Treasury. It has not been said explicitly to me, but I am aware, because I do my research before I talk to people, that the fill-their-boots mentality has damaged us in our approach to Treasury. The Members opposite, Mr Storey and Mr Frew, raised a range and litany of sins of the last Executive but ignored the enormous elephant over on those Benches: RHI. They talked about our approach to Treasury, but that is the most damaging thing that has occurred in our approach to Treasury over the past number of years, yet we will try to get across. We are also trying to secure confidence-and-supply money, which was cut off by the person who tried to steer Theresa May's deal through Westminster and whose experience of the DUP caused him to cut off what was left of our money for rural broadband, our money for a mental health strategy and our money for deprivation. Without any notice, he cut off that money, and we are continuing to negotiate that.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. For clarity, I was not ignoring RHI. Maybe you missed the point where I said that, when I was in the post of Finance Minister, I contacted the Comptroller and Auditor General about the irregular spend. My eyes were not closed, so when you are reporting that, the generalisations are unfair and unwarranted.

Mr Murphy: I was alluding to that, and I agree with the Member. I was Deputy Chair of the Economy Committee, and I also brought it to the attention of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the first RHI briefing that we had that they should specifically look into that project before the flag had been raised very high. The Member and Mr Frew were arguing vociferously that a failure to set a Budget was the greatest sin of the last Executive, and I am saying that there were much bigger sins in our dealings with Treasury. I am trying to get the confidence-and-supply money reinstated, and Members on the Benches opposite need to look at their own party's behaviour in Westminster as to why that has been so abruptly cut off and denied to us.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way. His colleague talked about the hard job that a Finance Minister has, and I agree with her. The Minister has a difficult job, but how much more difficult is that job when a Finance Minister cannot even bring forward one page of a Budget, like your past colleague failed to do for this Chamber?

Mr Murphy: I think that your timelines are wrong. I listened to you, but you kind of lost me in the history of time on all that. I make the point to you again: if you think that that was the biggest sin in the last Executive, you are a long way skewed from reality.

Those are some of the issues that we are dealing with. Andrew Muir made a number of points that I want to deal with. I confirm that I intend to keep transparency in the monitoring round process so that Committees can effectively scrutinise the financial process. He also raised the issue of fiscal levers. It is important that the Executive have the autonomy that they need on fiscal levers so that we can make decisions in the best interests of our people. We may not change them, but it is important that we have that ability should the Executive and the Assembly decide to do so.

Andrew Muir also mentioned the timing of the Budget, which I have just referred to. It is a difficult decision. The Executive made it this morning. I announced it this afternoon. That followed Mr Stalford's earlier announcement. There was a judgement to be made on whether to go ahead of the Budget in London, which would mean having to reallocate quickly should any consequences flow from that. The alternative was trying to get more certainty, which gives us logistical difficulties in the time frame beyond 11 March. The Executive decided to go beyond 11 March to try to get more certainty in the process, recognising, of course, that that creates logistical difficulties not only for Departments but for public bodies and planning spend into the new financial year.

A common theme was that Members are not terribly satisfied about where we are in this process. I remind them that this is the Secretary of State's Budget. This institution has been in place for five weeks. We will have a very uncertain financial year because we not only have to wait until 11 March for a Budget but we have to decide our own Budget. We move then into a Treasury spending review and, possibly, another Budget in the autumn in Britain.

A number of Members made general points on the unsatisfactory nature of the process. Unfortunately, that will be the feature of this year. There is a determination in the Executive to move to multi-year Budgets beyond that so that we can have much greater certainty. Members will have much earlier sight of what Departments are doing, what their proposals are and what bids they are making. They will see how we try to match those bids and then course that process over a number of years to see how it rolls out even beyond, certainly in indicative terms, the next mandate so that there is a clearer sense of how it is done.

I accept that nobody is arguing that where we are today is part of a very satisfactory process. However, we are trying to get the best level of scrutiny and trying to improve. No matter how early we came back, this was always going to be an uncertain financial year, given what is happening in London. We hope, from next year on, to get much more certainty into the process.

Mr Frew raised the issue that, at only three pages, there was insufficient detail in the Vote on Account. The Member needs to make sure that he does not confuse the Vote on Account with the setting of the 2020-21 Budget. The Vote on Account will always be a high-level document. The detail of the 2020-21 allocations and the services that they will deliver will be contained in the 2020-21 Main Estimates

that I will bring to the Assembly later in the year. That will be an opportunity for members on all Committees to fully consider and debate the detail of the spending proposals in the Assembly. Only the Main Estimates can authorise those detailed expenditure plans, not the high-level Vote on Account that we are talking about today.

Mr Carroll had the same misapprehension. He thought that he was voting today to approve some detail. In fact, all that detail will come back to the relevant Committees for approval and scrutiny. Today, we are voting to confirm spending that has already happened. That is to allow a degree of spending into the new financial year so that Departments do not run out of money. The full spending for the new financial year will come with the Budget and with the Main Estimates that follow it.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way on this very important point. I do not want to play politics, but the point that I was trying to raise was about doing things differently. When we talk about the Vote on Account for 2020-21, that is 45% of next year's expenditure. That is not small beer. That is a fundamental slice of the Budget for next year. We debate that here and then move on to an Estimates period. By that point, it is a *fait accompli*. We will have sleepwalked into that decision without having seen the detail necessary to scrutinise the Budget properly.

Mr Murphy: I do not agree with the Member. I said that, beyond the time of the Budget, the Main Estimates will be scrutinised and debated in the Chamber. There will be a Budget debate on the principles of what it is being proposed to spend, the bids that were able to be met as a consequence of whatever resources we manage to attract over the next number of weeks and how it is proposed to allocate them. We will then bring the Main Estimates to the House. None of the expenditure being voted on today for the new financial year has full authority. The only thing that has been authorised are the detailed expenditure plans, which are voted for in the Main Estimates. There has to be a degree of allowing Departments some authority to spend money into the new financial year — I think the figure of 45% is given — but the detailed approval of that comes on the other side of the Budget and before we hit the summer period, so people have an opportunity to give it proper scrutiny.

I realise that, for a lot of Members, given the very short time frame we have had in the run-up to this debate, there was more concern about scrutiny and making sure that we are across the decisions that are being taken. I repeat the point that this year will not be a very satisfactory year for examining the finances, but we will have an opportunity to look in detail at all the proposed spending for the next financial year. If we can, and the intention is that we will get into a multi-annual budgeting situation, I think that will give us much more certainty going forward.

Mr O'Toole is no longer with us, but he raised the point about the late Treasury announcement that it will give us an additional £18 million resource, which we allocated — people will have seen the statement I submitted to the Assembly last week on this — but it reduced by £52 million the capital available to us, which we, obviously, have to hold over until next year because we cannot deliver capital savings of that scale in the four or five weeks left in the financial year. That means we will start off with a lower baseline in next year's capital budget. We have complained, and we are trying to arrange dates for next week for the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers and I

can meet the Treasury, because they have also suffered the same experience of a very late readjustment to capital and resource budgets. It is not a satisfactory way of doing business. It was a very late announcement to us by Treasury, and the three Finance Ministers are going together to make sure that we emphasise the point that is not how we want to see business being done in the future.

I have responded to Mervyn Storey. On the audit reports, I absolutely accept that there are issues about austerity, which I can certainly refer to, and issues about how Treasury views previous spending, but we cannot ignore substantial reports about how we can spend better and improve systems. I will, as he suggested, look into the voluntary exit scheme to see how it has been rolled out and what the benefits are. I am not sure whether it was built into the scheme, but I know it has been discussed since that people who left under the scheme should not have been allowed to come back into the system and continue to be paid by the public purse. Whether that has been established in it, I do not know, but I am happy to look into it. I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee for many years, so I take the matter very seriously. The Public Accounts Committee performs a very valuable function in ensuring scrutiny across a broad range of spend, because Committees will rightly focus on their own departmental remits. Yes, of course, there are better ways we can do things, and we should always be striving to do better, be more efficient and ensure that there is no wastage, but there are many other issues at play with the finances available to Stormont.

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Minister giving way. He has been very generous with his time. At a recent meeting with the Executive Office, we were informed by officials that it is likely that the total cost of addressing the historical institutional abuse scandal could run to more than £600 million. Five institutions have been identified in connection with the scandal, so can the Minister detail for the House what contact there has been with those institutions and what percentage of that £600-plus million he anticipates receiving from those institutions as a contribution?

Mr Murphy: The figures will, obviously, be estimates because it will be a demand-led experience. Undoubtedly, it will be a significant cost however it ends up. It is TEO's responsibility to deal with that. I understand that there has been some contact with the institutions that are involved in the historical abuse inquiry outcome. I am not sure how detailed that contact has been. I imagine, and I am certain that, from the Finance Department's point of view, there has been no detailed discussion about a contribution or what level it should be; maybe the principle of a contribution has been discussed with the institutions. I agree with your point, and I think others made the point that those institutions involved in the abuse need to play their part.

It is not merely a responsibility for the public purse but a responsibility for the institutions responsible for the abuse that went on in their care at the time.

5.30 pm

As the Deputy Speaker said, a number of other Members covered a range of areas. I want to make best use of the time that I have left. I have obviously read, as Martina Anderson suggested, the report from Professor Hübnér. Of course, that is for another debate, as John O'Dowd said, but it is certainly one that will be useful to have.

I have addressed Sinéad Bradley's point about the unsatisfactory nature of this process and her desire to move to multi-annual Budgets. Kellie Armstrong raised an issue about the Department for Communities. It is always an issue for us when Departments surrender money. The financial transactions capital is not money that we had that was given back unspent. Rather, it is money that is available if it can be spent. The legislation, as she said, is being finalised. The difficulty is that the legislation was to have been introduced in Westminster, but it was not because there was no time slot available. That is what I understand. The Department anticipated spending that money last year but the opportunity fell. Of course, we need to ensure that Departments that have access to financial transactions capital avail themselves of it and make use of it. That is something on which we will be engaging with all Departments. However, there was a genuine rationale behind the Department for Communities not being able to do that last year. The Minister for Communities' intention is to have that legislation introduced here as soon as possible. I support her in that endeavour.

Mr Allister asked me for the figures, and I will happily come back tomorrow with them. I had them noted down in response to a question that is anticipated tomorrow, so I will have them for him tomorrow. He may find that there is not such a gap. Those are not our figures but figures done in Britain. Of course, when we estimate the tax take from here, we do not include a number of things, such as large corporations that are here and that raise revenue here but that pay their taxes in London. That tax take is therefore not included in our figures. As with all accountancy processes, we have to build in a number of caveats. When we estimate the spend here, we also include our contribution to the national debt, defence and the royal palaces, of which we have none. A range of contributions is scored against us, in an accountancy way, that add to what is considered to be the subvention. It is not simply a bald figure of, "This is what you get and what you do not get". It is not black and white. This is accountancy, and there are caveats. I am told that there is a plus or minus £3 billion, give or take, figure on that as well. I am happy to bring the figures tomorrow for Question Time and also to respond to Mr Allister's contribution.

It is an interesting argument that comes from the unionist Benches that the more impoverished we are, the stronger the union is. That is a bit of a perversion. I would rather see us be more prosperous and allowed to decide our own future than say, "What strengthens the union is the fact that we have a begging-bowl mentality here".

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Murphy: Yes.

Mr Allister: The Minister distorts the argument. What is the strength of the union is the strength of the United Kingdom, the fifth biggest economy in the world.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Allister: That is why the union is a strong financial bond. He wants to take us into a supplicant state of the EU, which now has to pay money to the EU that it cannot even find.

Mr Murphy: As I said, the arguments on the union, economic benefits and reunification are for another day. What I will say is that the Member made his argument

in the context of the fiscal deficit, and I am merely responding. He seems to think that the bigger the deficit, the stronger we are in the union. In other words, the more impoverished we are, the more reliant we are on the connection to the mother ship in Britain.

Almost all contributions in the debate were laced with references to austerity. Many Members lamented the lack of funding that we have and how things are spent. Some of the criticisms of how Departments have done their business are very valid. Some of the criticisms of how we have done our business collectively in this institution are valid. Underpinning all that, however, is austerity. You can join the dots and arrive at the fact that we have had nine years of Budget reductions. We have £500 million less this year than we had in 2011-12. That cannot happen without there being some damage to public services. When a party, UCUNF — whatever we call that particular marriage — heralded the return of the Tories, and when a party had a choice in 2017 between a Labour Government that was promising an end to austerity and throwing its lot in with a Tory Government that gave us three or four more years of austerity, you cannot lament the choices that you made and blame everybody else for the fact that our public services have been crippled because of austerity policies that have come from London.

Ms Dillon: Will the Minister take an intervention?

Mr Murphy: The Minister will take one last intervention.

Ms Dillon: Does the Minister agree that it is not only the institutions that are responsible for making an input to the HIA redress scheme? The British Government were the institution in charge here for a number of years. They were responsible for those children, and they let them down. They also need to pay up.

Mr Murphy: Of course some of the abuse took place during the old Stormont regime, right through the '50s, '60s and probably even further back, and some of it through the period of direct rule. Of course, there is an argument for the Government who had responsibility for oversight at that stage paying a share of that, and we intend to make that argument.

I go back to the point I was making. Austerity is a factor. It is not the only factor — there are other factors that we could look at — but it is the main factor in the reduction of the budgets available to us in our struggle and our challenge to provide decent public services. When people are examining all of the issues that face us, they should have that interlaced through it all. They should remember their support for parties that were embarking on programmes of austerity and which continued those programmes of austerity. They should recognise that and recognise their own contribution to all of that as the debate runs on and as we debate whatever allocation we have for the Budget in the next number of weeks.

I draw my remarks to a close and thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle, for your patience, and the Cheann Comhairle for his patience as well. The Assembly approval of the Supply motion today, and the associated departmental expenditure plans laid out in the 2019-2020 spring Supplementary Estimates and the 2020-21 Vote on Account, is a crucial stage of the existing public expenditure cycle. Failure to pass these Supply resolutions at this juncture would put at risk the smooth continuation of public services for the remainder of this financial year and

into the next financial year. I therefore commend the spring Supplementary Estimates for 2019-2020 and the Vote on Account for 2020-21 to the Assembly, and I ask Members to support the motions.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the vote on this motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £17,519,166,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 and that resources, not exceeding £21,022,321,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 2(c) and 3(c) of table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): We now move to the motion on the Vote on Account, which has already been debated. Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the vote on this motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,962,895,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 and that resources, not exceeding £9,054,440,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4 and 6 of table 1 in the Northern Ireland Estimates and Vote on Account 2020-21 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

Budget Bill: First Stage

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I beg to introduce the Budget Bill [NIA 02/17-22], which is a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the years ending 31 March 2020 and 2021; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources for those years; to revise the limits on the use of certain accruing resources in the year ending 31 March 2020; and to authorise the Department of Finance to borrow on the credit of the sum appropriated for the year ending 31 March 2021.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Speaker is satisfied that the Bill is within the legislative competence of the Assembly.

I inform Members that the Speaker has received a letter from the Committee for Finance informing him that, in order to ensure that the Budget Bill can proceed, the Committee has reluctantly agreed that, without prejudice to the level of detail that the Committee will expect when the Department of Finance consults the Committee on future Budget Bills, the Committee is satisfied that under these extenuating circumstances, in this case only, the consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill has been appropriate, as required under Standing Order 42(2).

Adjourned at 5.41 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 February 2020

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Second Stage

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA 2/17-22] be agreed.

Today's Second Stage follows yesterday's approval of the Supply resolutions by the Assembly for the expenditure plans of Departments and other public bodies, as detailed in the 2019-2020 spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) and the 2021 Vote on Account. As Members will be aware, accelerated passage of the Bill is necessary in order to ensure Royal Assent prior to the end of March. Were the Bill not to proceed by accelerated passage and receive Assembly approval before the end of the financial year, Departments and other public bodies may have legislative difficulty in accessing cash. That would threaten the delivery of public services, not just for the closing weeks of the current financial year but for the early months of the 2020-21 financial year.

I am very grateful to the Finance Committee for confirming that, in line with Standing Order 42, the Bill can proceed under accelerated passage. I thank the Committee for its work in agreeing to accelerated passage. We all recognise that the situation this year has been far from satisfactory, given that the 2019-2020 Budget was set by the Secretary of State rather than the Executive and that the devolved institutions have been restored so close to the end of the financial year.

In the normal course of events, the Committee would have been heavily involved in the setting of the 2019-2020 Budget right from its inception, with the Main Estimates, which would have been debated in the Assembly before the summer, providing the statutory authority for expenditure against the Executive's Budget through each of the in-year monitoring rounds and up to the finalisation and publication of the SSEs and the introduction of the Budget Bill. That programme of work has not been possible in the 2019-2020 year, with the unsatisfactory situation of a Budget being set by the Secretary of State and the Main Estimates being approved in Westminster. The work of the Finance Committee in that respect is vital, and I am glad that a programme of work can now be put in place for the incoming 2020-21 financial year.

Standing Order 32 directs that the Second Stage debate should be confined to the general principles of the Bill, and I shall endeavour to keep to that direction. The main purpose of the Bill is to authorise the cash and use of

resource on services based on the Executive's final spending plans for 2019-2020 for Departments and other public bodies as set out in the spring Supplementary Estimates for 2019-2020. The Bill also provides authorisation for the cash and use of resources in the early months of the 2021 financial year as a Vote on Account, pending the Assembly's consideration of the Main Estimates and the Budget (No. 2) Bill in June.

Copies of the Budget Bill and the explanatory and financial memorandum have been made available to Members today, and the 2019-2020 spring Supplementary Estimates and the 2021 Vote on Account were laid in the Assembly on 19 February.

The Bill will authorise a further £17,519,166,000 from the Consolidated Fund and the further use of resources totalling £21,022,321,000 by the Departments and certain other bodies listed in schedules 1 and 2 to the Bill in the year ending 31 March 2020. The cash and resources are to be spent and used on the services listed in column 1 of each schedule. These amounts supersede the amounts that were previously authorised in Westminster through the Main Estimates.

The Bill also sets for the current financial year a limit for each Department on the use of accruing resources. Accruing resources are current and capital receipts totalling £3,213,458,000. The accruing resources are to be spent and used on the services listed in column 1 of schedule 2.

The total resources and accruing resources now provided in the Bill bring the total for use by Departments in 2019-2020 to over £24 billion. In addition, the Bill will authorise the issue of a further £7,962,895,000 from the Consolidated Fund and the further use of resources totalling £9,054,440,000 by Departments and certain other bodies listed in schedules 3 and 4 to the Bill in the year ending 31 March 2021. The cash and resources are to be spent and used on the services listed in column 1 of schedules 3 and 4.

This is the Vote on Account and, as I explained, does not constitute the setting of a Budget for 2020-21. It is merely to allow Departments to continue to operate and provide services in the early months of that year, pending consideration of the Executive's Budget for that year through the Main Estimates and the Budget (No. 2) Bill in June.

While the vast majority of expenditure by all Departments is done on the authority of the statutory powers provided through legislation passed by the Assembly, there are occasionally some — usually small — functions that

may from time to time be done on the sole authority of the Budget Act. When a Department is making use of the sole authority of the Budget Act, it will highlight this fact by placing a note with a black box symbol in the corresponding Estimate.

Given that the Main Estimate for 2021 will not be available until June, I want to make the Assembly aware that the Department for Communities is making preparations to extend the existing welfare mitigation schemes. Until Royal Assent is received for the Welfare Supplementary Payments (Loss of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit) Bill and until the Welfare Supplementary Payment Extension Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 have been approved by a resolution of the Assembly, the Department seeks approval to incur spend under the sole authority of the Budget Bill at an estimated cost of £7 million until 31 May 2020.

These amounts of resource include not only the departmental expenditure limits (DEL) on which our Budget process mainly focuses but the departmental demand-led annually managed expenditure (AME). Clause 5 provides for the temporary borrowing by my Department of £3,981,448,000. This is approximately half the sum authorised by clause 4 for issue out of the Consolidated Fund. I must stress that clause 5 does not provide for the issue of any additional cash out of the Consolidated Fund or convey any additional spending power, but it enables my Department to run an effective and efficient cash management regime and ensure minimum drawdown of the block grant on a daily basis, which is important when contemplating the daily borrowing by Departments.

The legislation is required for every public service. Whether a schoolteacher or a nurse, the building of a road or the training required for gaining a job, all public services need the legislation to operate in the financial year. It is crucial legislation that underpins public services.

I am happy to deal with any points of principle or detail of the Budget Bill that Members may wish to raise.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Minister. The Second Stage of the Budget Bill having been moved, in accordance with convention, the Business Committee has not allocated any time limits on the debate.

Mr Frew (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance): The Chair is not able to make it this morning, which is an unfortunate development. I will stand in on his behalf, as any good Deputy Chair would. I have his back. However, I beg forgiveness from the Chamber. It is not very often that I am dictionary-correct when I speak, and I feel that I will be susceptible to error today having just read the speech before me. Please bear with me and give me that wee bit of latitude.

As we have heard, the Budget Bill provides statutory authority for expenditure as set out in the spring Supplementary Estimates for 2019-2020. The Bill also includes the Vote on Account, which allows Departments to incur expenditure and use resources in the early part of 2020-21, until the Main Estimates are voted on by the Assembly in June. Standing Order 42(2) states that accelerated passage may be granted for a Budget Bill, provided that the Committee for Finance is satisfied that it has been appropriately consulted:

“on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill”.

At the Committee meeting on 19 February, departmental officials provided oral evidence and answered questions on the Budget Bill, including on issues relating to a number of Departments. As the Chairperson pointed out in yesterday's Supply resolution debate, the scale of the changes resulting from the normal reallocations through monitoring rounds combined with the in-year technical changes will have, in some cases, resulted in significant differences between the opening and closing resource and capital allocations of Departments.

The Committee also noted the Minister's written statement to the Assembly highlighting late changes of £18 million of resource arising from Barnett consequential that the Executive agreed to allocate for 2019-2020. For capital, there is a corresponding reduction of some £52 million. That required the Executive to agree to manage this in 2020-2021 since our capital spend is fully committed for this year. During oral evidence, the Committee noted that headroom of £18 million was already factored into the Estimates and, therefore, no change to the spring Supplementary Estimates was necessary. However, perhaps more notable was the late notification of the Barnett consequential from Her Majesty's Treasury. Officials stated that they were not able to recollect a later time in the financial year when Treasury made changes of such magnitude.

The Committee welcomes the limited engagement with the Department on these issues. However, as the Chairperson mentioned yesterday, in the absence of a functioning Assembly, the level of consultation with the Committee on the public expenditure proposals was far from what the Committee would expect during a conventional Budget cycle. The Committee deliberated on the matter for a considerable time before coming to an agreement to grant accelerated passage to the Budget Bill under the requirements set out in Standing Order 42(2). The Committee took into account the level of consultation that it would expect during a normal Budget cycle; the constraints imposed by the prevailing circumstances; and the adverse impact of withholding authority from Departments to incur the spend on the additional resources that had been granted in-year. Every Committee member who was present expressed dissatisfaction with the process, but, in the end, the Committee came to the conclusion that it could only agree to confirm that the Bill proceed under the accelerated passage procedure, taking full account of the prevailing circumstances and without prejudice to the detailed level of consultation that the Committee will expect on future Budget Bills.

In considering future financial scrutiny, the Committee questioned departmental officials about exploring the process and timescales for forthcoming Budgets. It welcomed their commitment and assurances that views from the Assembly will be sought as early as practicable and that there will be regular and meaningful engagement with Statutory Committees. In particular, the Committee welcomed officials' acknowledgement of the leading role of the Finance Committee in producing a coordinated report reflecting the considerations of all Statutory Committees.

Over the coming weeks, once the timing of the Budget and Main Estimates is known, the Committee will consider its approach to coordinating Budget scrutiny across Committees in a standard, coherent manner that will help

to facilitate Committees in fulfilling their statutory role and responsibilities for Budget scrutiny.

We will, of course, ensure that the relevant Committees are consulted on our intended approach in the early stages of its development.

10.45 am

The Committee also received assurances from officials on the in-year monitoring process, and I am happy to report that the formal practice of departmental bids will be reintroduced to ensure greater transparency in future Budget scrutiny. That will be reflected in the in-year monitoring guidance, which is anticipated to be published by the Department of Finance early in the new financial year.

That leads me on to one aspect of work that will help to support the Assembly's approach to financial scrutiny, which is very much needed in this place. At a time when we are aiming to deliver much-needed reform to our public services, it is absolutely right that, as an Assembly, we look to reform how we undertake our scrutiny, particularly when it comes to public expenditure. We need to move to a more inclusive and collaborative approach that will reform how the Executive and the Assembly interact when the Budget is being developed and scrutinised. We must ensure that the budgetary process becomes meaningful and embraces the role that the Assembly can and should play in influencing and contributing to how public money is spent. We must change the cultural behaviours and attitudes and reform our processes in the same way in which we ask others to accept reforms.

One specific area in bringing about this much-needed reform is through the memorandum of understanding between the Assembly and the Executive. Members from all parties who served on the former Finance and Personnel Committee highlighted that issue over a number of years and budgetary cycles. The aim of the memorandum is to provide solutions to many of the difficulties and flaws in the budgetary process and to establish a framework for improved cooperation between the Executive and the Assembly on budgetary matters. It would also facilitate Members and Committees in fulfilling their scrutiny and advisory functions, which, in turn, will assist in overseeing the effective and efficient delivery of the Executive's strategic priorities. In addition, the memorandum will support the Executive in their role in managing public expenditure and will help maintain and enhance good working relationships between Departments and their Committees. Indeed, a draft memorandum of understanding was jointly prepared by Assembly and DOF officials during the 2011 mandate.

If implemented, the memorandum of understanding would help to address those fundamental weaknesses in our financial and budgetary process. In particular, it would help the Assembly to give conscientious consideration to budgetary proposals, and it would influence draft Budgets at the formative stages and key decisions in advance of future Budgets being agreed by the Executive. That is what open, transparent, meaningful consultation is all about. Predecessors referenced the memorandum on a number of occasions, yet this is a significant body of work on which, to date, agreement has not been reached.

Recent events have emphasised the need for greater oversight and scrutiny of public expenditure. I therefore

encourage the Executive and the Assembly to achieve an agreed process for budgetary scrutiny as a matter of urgency. In this regard, it would be helpful if the Minister in his winding-up speech today would provide a commitment to the House that work will resume to finalise and agree the memorandum of understanding between the Assembly and the Executive. In supporting a memorandum and other reforms, we, as an Assembly, also need to ensure that, in conducting our business, these institutions adapt and align to further demonstrate that devolution is working effectively and efficiently and that we can play our part in fulfilling the commitments arising from the agreements that we have made.

In the meantime, on behalf of the Committee for Finance, I support the motion. There ends my contribution as Deputy Chairperson of the Finance Committee. It was very important to place the Committee's wishes and thought processes on the record in Hansard.

I will now speak as the DUP's finance spokesperson. That will allow me that wee bit more freedom to say what I wish. I will not, as far as possible, rehearse what I said yesterday. I want to demonstrate the frustrations that I, as a Bench-Bench MLA, feel daily, not just in this new age of the Assembly but in my 10 years as an MLA, and to explain my experiences of scrutiny and effecting real change.

We have sometimes heard Ministers in this place talk the talk, but have we really seen them walk the walk? If we are to have a truly collective Executive, they have to be truly collective, not only in the decisions that are made but in the responsibilities that they have. That is quite difficult when we have a five-party Executive and can lead to dangers. I make this point about the memorandum of understanding. We have a five-party Executive and an Assembly made up mostly of MLAs from those five parties, with very few Members not belonging to them, so it is incumbent on us, in our job and in our role, to make sure that scrutiny happens. That is why it is incumbent on me to ask all the tough questions and raise all the tough issues that we face now and in the future and also to bring up and display my disgruntlement when something goes wrong.

I give the Finance Minister the same commitment today that I gave him when we first met in Committee: I will work alongside him to try to work out the best path forward for this country and its people, in order to make lives better. One question that we should all ask — Ministers, Committee Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Back-Bench MLAs — about every decision that we take is this: is that the effect, is that the impact or is it the other way round? I know that there are some really tough decisions to be made by the Executive and then by us in the House. That those decisions are difficult does not mean that they should not be made. I am sick and tired of cans being kicked down the road. I am sick and tired of us having the power in this place that a regional Assembly should have and then not availing ourselves of those powers to the best of our abilities to bring tangible and true benefits to the people of Northern Ireland.

Although there are a lot of figures with a lot of zeros in a Budget, when those are stripped away, a Budget comes down to the basics of how spending and saving works in a household. Let us try not to complicate things too much, because, ultimately, this comes down to the fiscal management of funding for our people. I raise that point because we need to get back to basics. Look at

the torment that our Civil Service has gone through. I commend it for the way in which it held this place up as a country over the past three years. I also commend the permanent secretaries for making the decisions that they had to make, when they knew, fine rightly, that it was not their place to do so. Of course, the input from the NIO and the Secretary of State was not ideal and really should not have happened. When we consider all that, we really need to get back to basics. Look at the traumatic situation that most of our systems, Departments and arm's-length bodies have been placed in over funding and over how they should move forward. One way in which we can fix that is through Budget Bills. Again I have a lot of sympathy for the Minister, even today, because a lot of the stuff in the Bill has already happened; he had no say on decisions that were made. Then, of course, there is the Vote on Account, which is 45% of our Budget spend for the next financial term. That is very important. I made the point yesterday that the Assembly, as a corporate body, has not had the time to scrutinise the detail and bids of all the Departments. That is fundamentally important. Again, it picks up on the point that the Chair was going to make, and which I made, about the memorandum of understanding.

I will go in to some detail around some of the worries that I have, which have been raised with me lately at both constituency and regional level. Public-sector pay is one. I know that a 1% pay rise equates to about £8 million. I hope that I am right; this is recorded in Hansard. That is hard-earned money going back into the hands of hard-working people, who then spend money in the economy. They are taxed on it, so that actually helps the system. Money, and the spending of it, makes the world go round, so it is very important that public-sector pay gets to an appropriate and comparable level. If you do not, market forces come in to play; people will move away and do not engage with the Civil Service, and it will not recruit. That is going to be a massive issue in the future. We already know that we have an ageing workforce in our Civil Service. That really needs to be addressed. One way of addressing that is through apprenticeship schemes for all areas of our Civil Service, especially our skills. I ask the Minister to consider greatly how we can reform the recruitment process in the Civil Service to ensure that the skills are there, the people are there and the pay is there for the appropriate level of skill in our Civil Service.

I had a meeting last week with a developer in my constituency who told me that, even though he has planning permission for apartments, which are badly needed in the area in which he is going to build, he cannot get a connection for sewerage. That is another massive issue that the Assembly really has not dealt with at any time. Just because we cannot see the pipes underneath our ground does not mean that they are not breaking down, that they are not becoming older and decrepit and that they are able to do the function that we ask them to do. There has to be massive investment in our water and sewerage systems. The point that I made yesterday was that just placing more money into NI Water's hands, or just raising more capital and revenue through water charges, simply will not cut it; basically, you are flushing money down the drain. We need to reform the system that operates and spends that money every day. We have never grappled with that, but we need to because, ultimately, the problem is not going to go away; it is only going to get worse. Just because we cannot see the pipes

underneath the ground does not mean that they are not there and that the problem is not there.

Look at Health. I had a meeting with the Northern Trust only last week. My colleague Pam Cameron was also at the meeting. We saw very clearly the impact and the positive effect of the supply money that the DUP was able to get from the Government. The way the money is being spent in the Northern Trust is very good; it has helped with things like healthcare and waiting lists. However, that money is limited; it is going to come to an end. It is very important that we identify the schemes put in place by the confidence-and-supply money that have worked well and that we try to make sure that those are funded continually, right until we solve the problems in our health system.

11.00 am

Again, we need to look at our health system and the reforms that need to take place, because — and this was raised yesterday by my colleague Christopher Stalford, in relation to 50% of our budget going to health — if we continue to do the things that we are doing, that percentage will only increase. If it only increases without any reform, we are going to struggle everywhere, not just in health but in every Department. We are going to jam the fiscal system to the point where it cannot operate.

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

Housing is another massive issue that we must face. Are we building enough houses? Absolutely not. Are we looking after the current stock that we have? Absolutely not. Look at how many times cycle schemes and other schemes for improving houses, such as window schemes and roofing schemes, have been delayed. How many times have we, as MLAs, been given a commitment that a scheme is going to happen in June, yet it is still to start by June of the next year? That needs to be resolved, and it is purely down to finance.

Reform is also needed in housing. We need to give the Housing Executive the tools that it requires to function appropriately; the debt issue, which is massive, needs to be resolved; and the way our housing associations work and how they can build houses needs to be reformed. The problems all pile on top of each other. We cannot have a policy to build 20,000 new homes, which is a lovely target and policy, when we do not have the sewerage system in place to accommodate that build. That is why we need a collective Executive that can take a panoramic view when making a decision, which the Assembly and the Committees can scrutinise properly.

Look at our infrastructure. We hear the Minister shouting all the time when she is here about the potholes and the street lights, and she is absolutely right. We need to ensure that our streets are safe, that our roads are traffic-worthy and that our cars are roadworthy with regard to the MOT system. We must ensure that the street lights are on because, if they are not, it impacts greatly on elderly folk. There is absolutely no doubt about it; if we want to get elderly folk out and about and more active, street lighting is a massive issue for them.

I could list a lot of things that are going wrong with the place, and I realise and admit that I am not giving many solutions. It is the responsibility of this Assembly to consider solutions at Committee level and help the

Executive to achieve the goals that we need them to set. I give a commitment to the Finance Minister to work with him in the Committee. I hope that the Committee, as a collective, will do this too — support him when there are tough decisions to be made and not play politics, as we have done in the past, with decisions that need to be made. Ultimately, if we do not make decisions, our people and our families are going to end up having worse lives. That is basically the point.

I look forward to seeing the Budget Bill passed, I look forward to seeing the spring Estimates, and I look forward to the new Budget that the Minister will table once he has received information and a drawdown from the Exchequer when it launches its Budget on 11 March. The Minister made a decision yesterday about delaying that process. That process is the right one to have, and a Budget Bill should be brought forward after we find out from the Exchequer what we are getting. He talked about the end of March, and he has a very fine window of time in which to bring it, because there are all sorts of regulatory and mechanical fixtures at play. So, he is probably left with only the last Monday and Tuesday of March to bring it. Again, we need that as quickly as possible.

I also look forward to the day when the new process starts, and it should start very soon — no later than April, the start of the new financial year — where we are working on a Budget for the next year. It will be very important to bring that information to the Finance Committee as soon as possible, so that we can inject our thought processes and other Committees can inject their thought processes into that mix, so that, when a draft Budget is formed and launched to the Committee in September, hopefully, before it goes out to consultation, there will be a Budget that is nearly there, is fit for purpose and has all the requirements that we need moving forward. The public would then have their say in the public consultation, which should be meaningful. In itself, the process of this regional Assembly going out to consultation on a Budget is unique and, I believe, quite healthy. That would take place and inform the Budget, so that what we have in December and January is something that is fit for purpose and robust, with everybody having been injected into that psyche and that mindset to produce a Budget that helps our people moving forward.

I say all that in hope, because I must put on record again that the previous Sinn Féin Finance Minister failed to bring forward a draft Budget in September. All the Committees were screaming for that Budget, and it did not come in September. It did not come in October or November or December or January. That left this place and the Civil Service in a very bad place, and I hope never, ever to return to a place like that again.

The other point I will make is this.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for giving way. I listened to him yesterday, and I hear him saying the same thing today, which will probably be the case with a lot of Members. The Member referred to the fact that no Budget Bill was brought forward, but he failed to explain why. I heard him and his colleague yesterday refer to RHI as a “botched boiler scheme”. Given the fact that there were allegations leading to corruption at the heart of government and the fact that public money was under such scrutiny by the public and other Committee members,

will the Member perhaps elaborate on why the Budget Bill could not be brought forward, please?

Mr Frew: That is quite extraordinary. I thank the Member for her contribution and interjection, but to now suggest that the Sinn Féin Finance Minister did not bring forward a Budget in September because of RHI is quite incredulous. That is the first I have heard that, and I must say that I am confused. The party opposite me is in denial.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to move back to the principles of the Budget Bill, please.

Mr Frew: Yes, I will. The Budget Bill is very clear. It is facts and figures, and we need to make sure —.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. I am glad that he is not playing politics on the issue, as he said that we should not do that. I cannot help but concur with most of what the Member said yesterday and has repeated today, but I cannot help feeling like Bobby Ewing having woken up to find the past 10 years have been a dream, with the DUP bearing no responsibility whatsoever for anything that has happened or has not happened during that time.

Coming back to the point: the Member says that we hope to be in a better position next year and have a draft Budget by September for the following year and that that is how it will be fit for purpose. Will the Member agree that, for the Budget to be really fit for purpose, we should be seeing a draft Budget in September for the next two or three years and we should be moving to multi-year budgeting? Will he agree that, when we are doing a yearly Budget cycle, there is no way that it can ever be truly fit for purpose?

Mr Frew: The Member makes an excellent contribution on that point. We want to get to a place where we have multi-year Budgets. It is the only way to go in this place, and it will allow flexibility, I am sure, in the way that we spend money. There is a pressure when we do not have money, but there is also a pressure when we have too much money in a Department and it cannot be spent on time and has to go into the monitoring rounds. The more that we have flexibility and the more that we have foresight, it is a very good thing. I commend the Member for making that point.

I also look forward to the day when the SDLP votes for a Budget in this place, given that it had no real responsibility for it before.

Mr Durkan: We look forward to one that is fit for purpose.

Mr Frew: I will give way to the Member again if he wants to come in. There is no problem there.

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I remind Members to come back to the principles of the Budget Bill, please.

Mr Buckley: As a Back-Bench Member, I find that there is nothing more frustrating than watching how, at the end of a Budget cycle, Departments — in particular, the Department for Infrastructure — bid for money and roll out that use of finite resource on schemes that are not priority issues, whether at a constituency or regional level. Does the Member concur with that?

Mr Frew: The Member makes a very good point. We have to get back to basics. All MLAs have a wish list as long as their arm, and we would all love to have it funded,

but we cannot fund everything. The Budget Bill makes it clear that we cannot fund everything. We can all demand that our wish lists be put on a Budget line, and we can all have red lines turning into Budget lines, but it will not help our people. It will not help our people when our services are struggling, our health service is crumbling, and the infrastructure below our feet is crumbling. We really need to get back to basics and prioritise what we spend our money on.

The point that I wanted to make before I was interrupted by all those interventions — I thank Members for the interventions, and welcome them, because that is how we get the most out of our debates — is that we have had a draft Programme for Government for the last three years. It was agreed in draft form by the Executive, and not once have I seen a Budget Bill refer to the priorities of that Programme for Government.

The Programme for Government will work only if it is populated with cash. Budgets will work in tandem with the Programme for Government only if it is overlapped and overlaid. I do not see that happening. I do not see where you can relate and attribute money in the Budget Bill to the draft Programme for Government. The Executive may well produce a new draft Programme for Government. That is all well and good, and, hopefully, it will not be much different from the goals, outputs and indicators that were set out in the previous one. However, until we have money alongside a Budget line going to each outcome, I do not see how the two can walk down the path together. I ask the Minister to consider not only how we finance the Programme for Government but how we scrutinise it. If money goes to goals that the Programme for Government has set, which the Executive agree to, how do we ensure that those goals are being financed appropriately? That needs to happen. It does not matter whether we agree with some of the outcomes in the Programme for Government. They will be agreed, and we will have to move forward in that way. We can always complain and debate, but unless we have money on the lines going to each of those goals, they will just not happen.

My plea today is to get back to basics. Let us fix the things that need to be fixed. We all know what they are. Let us have the political will and the courage to make those things right and to reform them. Some of these systems have been in place for decades, and they need to change. They are not fit for purpose. That will take funding, which, if it goes to the right places to make the necessary reforms, will not only make savings for our people but make their lives better. That is where we need to be. Surely that is where the Assembly and the Executive, which make the decisions, need to be.

I applaud the Minister for bringing the Bill forward, and I congratulate his staff. I am sure that the civil servants in the Department of Finance have had it tough over the last three years. In fact, I know that they have had it tough. I commend them for their speed in getting this all in place as soon as the Assembly was up and running. Of course, the Departments were not just faced with the policies that they had to devise for this place but have had to answer all the ministerial questions from MLAs and all that. They have had to ramp up very quickly in the last month, for which I commend them. It is important that they get up to speed as quickly as possible. I wish them all the best in the two-pronged approach — in fact, the three-pronged approach

— in the next financial year not only in producing a Budget very soon after the Chancellor's Budget but in making the conditions right for a draft Budget in September, which the Finance Committee will then be able to scrutinise and go to consultation on.

11.15 am

Dr Archibald (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy): I will speak, first, as Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy. As Members will be aware, the Department for the Economy has a key role in driving forward prosperity, improving skills and ensuring that people can meet the challenges of new industries and jobs that may not yet exist. The Committee has had a number of briefings on the Department's budget, and members have now got to grips with the funding that is available to the Department in the next financial year and the pressures that, as yet, have not been funded. A LeasCheann Comhairle, you, the Minister and other Members will be glad to hear that I do not intend simply to regurgitate the highlights of the Economy Department's budget. Instead, I want to speak about vision. I want to share how its budget is a key ingredient in making a better and more sustainable future for all.

The Department for the Economy's remit, like that of other Departments, is wide and subject to a range of demands. It extends to further and higher education, skills, careers, energy, tourism and workers' rights. The Department will, of course, be a key player in the management of Brexit. Many of the plans in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document depend on the Economy Department for their development and realisation. It, therefore, seems obvious that funding for the Department should be prioritised. The Committee heard with concern about the scale of unfunded inescapable and high-priority pressures — some £110 million — that the Department will carry into the new financial year. Of course, other Departments carry even bigger pressures, and we must continue to invest in health and education, which are close to people's hearts. The Committee does not disagree with that.

However, in a context of limited resources, funds must be targeted where they do most good and provide the most benefit. The Department for the Economy will produce strategies for industry, tourism, energy, careers, skills and a host of other areas, which will help to develop and expand our economy. The Department's budget was reduced by £46.2 million in 2016-17 and £30.3 million in 2017-18. It flatlined in 2018-19 and 2019-2020. Pressures that require funding include further education, EU exit preparation, city deals, energy and those that are linked to upskilling to make the economy more productive, competitive and sustainable. In New Decade, New Approach, the Executive highlight their plans to invest for the future, improve productivity, seek new trading opportunities post the EU exit and develop a regionally balanced economy with opportunities for all. There is also a promise to ensure that there is the right mix of skills for a thriving economy. Delivery of those will require a properly funded Department for the Economy.

The 'New Decade, New Approach' document also highlights that the Executive will prioritise the economic potential offered by the various city deals. Additionally, there are plans to bring more events here, like the Open championship, to boost tourism, as well as plans to

develop an enhanced approach to careers advice, the curriculum, training and apprenticeships. All of that must be properly funded. The 'New Decade, New Approach' document also highlights that a priority for the forthcoming PFG will be:

"creating good jobs and protecting workers' rights."

Funding will be required for that, too. On the proposed expansion of student numbers at Ulster University's Magee campus, the 'New Decade, New Approach' document states:

"The Executive will bring forward proposals for the development and expansion of the UU campus at Magee College, including the necessary increase in maximum student numbers to realise the 10,000 student campus target and a Graduate Entry Medical School."

The 'New Decade, New Approach' document also makes commitments to tackle climate change. Those will fall to the Economy Department, as will action on workers' rights. That amounts to quite an agenda of work for a Department that goes into the new financial year with a substantial funding gap. The Committee supports the ambition of the Economy Minister and the Executive more widely. However, it will be the Committee's job to ensure that there is delivery on the commitments made. Members are up for that job, and the Committee looks forward to working with the Minister on the delivery of this worthy agenda on the back of a good budget outcome for the Department.

I will now make some remarks as Sinn Féin's spokesperson on the economy and climate action. I will continue on the theme of a vision for the future. The economy and climate action are two priority areas that need coordinated investment to drive economic growth and productivity while reducing carbon emissions. However, we are faced with the consequences of a decade of Tory austerity. We are also in the midst of dealing with, and we will undoubtedly have to continue to deal with for many years to come, the entirely negative consequences of an unwanted and unnecessary Brexit. People here voted to reject Brexit, a rejection that has been reiterated on a number of occasions since June 2016.

Last week saw the start of the negative outworkings of Brexit, with immigration proposals that show once again that the British Government have no regard for our economy or unique circumstances. They completely ignored the opinions and views of business leaders here, who engaged constructively and in good faith, and they have proposed instead a system that is a threat to many sectors of our economy, including the hospitality, agri-food, care and tourism sectors. For our part, as a party, we will continue to stand up for the best interests of Ireland, North and South, and make the case for our economy, businesses and communities.

The type of budgetary pressures that I outlined for the Department for the Economy, are, of course, reflected across the Executive. The British and Irish Governments produced the 'New Decade, New Approach' document following several months of negotiations for which the watchwords were "credible" and "sustainable". Time and again, Sinn Féin and other parties outlined that to be credible and sustainable the institutions required proper financing. The immediate rolling back on the costed and

negotiated budgetary commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document by the British Government represents incredible bad faith and hinders the Executive's ability to deliver effective and high-quality public services. I have no doubt that the Finance Minister will continue to impress upon the British Government and Treasury the urgent need for them to fulfil their financial obligations.

We need a new economic strategy that promotes good jobs and ensures regional balance while decarbonising our economy and addressing long-term low productivity. Low productivity is a fundamental cause of this region's economic underperformance, and it must be tackled head-on. That means investing in skills on a regionally balanced basis, supporting entrepreneurship, addressing the structural barriers that discourage women from reaching their economic potential and directing resources on the basis of objective need. It means upholding workers' rights and protections and putting an end to casualisation practices, including precarious work and zero-hour contracts. We need to value and empower the most important element of our economy, which is our people, and ensure that our young people have opportunities to aspire to.

It means investing in infrastructure to address the decades of regional imbalance and ensure the connectedness of our rural communities. A green new deal is a Programme for Government commitment in New Decade, New Approach. It must be at the core of the economic strategy to help effectively tackle the climate emergency through a just transition to a net zero carbon society. Promoting green skills development, including the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, must be a priority. We need a new energy strategy that enables the transition to a net zero carbon society with obligations and incentives that must include support for retrofitting and, importantly, is based on the principles of a just transition and does not punish those who are least able to afford it.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree with her about the energy strategy; it is very important. Is she concerned, as I am, with the current investigation by the Utility Regulator on the independence and governance of SONI and how that organisation has been stripped of capacity and leadership, which could well undermine any energy strategy going forward? We actually really need to fix SONI in order to get the most out of any energy strategy.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Before the Member responds, let me say that I am not quite sure how that relates to the Budget Bill. The Member can respond to this as she sees fit.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Member for his intervention, and we will, of course, await the Utility Regulator's response on that.

The new economic strategy, along with tackling the climate emergency and mitigating the impact of Brexit, requires targeted investment. However, while we continue to lack the fiscal powers to effectively balance our own budget, we continue to be constrained in our ability to invest adequately and most effectively. I welcome the Finance Minister's commitment to set up a commission to explore the devolution of fiscal powers. We also need to see greater cooperation across the island of Ireland to strengthen our closely interlinked and interdependent economy and to make best use of our public services

in both jurisdictions. We need to urgently facilitate the discussion on our constitutional future. It is certainly my clear view that a new, agreed Ireland is the best context within which to grow our economy and develop our society, ending unnecessary duplication and planning to deliver public services in education, further and higher —

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. A couple of times in her contribution she mentioned the need for legislation and forward thinking to tackle the climate emergency. I have yet to hear her mention public transport, namely Translink. Does she not see a direct contradiction in the Assembly a couple of weeks ago declaring a climate emergency yet organisations such as Translink being on the brink of collapse?

Dr Archibald: I thank the Member for his intervention. I did say that we need to invest in infrastructure as well. It is important that we do that in a regionally balanced way and in a way that supports addressing net-zero carbon targets.

As I was saying, we need to end unnecessary duplication. We need to plan in order to deliver our public services in education, further and higher education, health, housing and everything else across the island, ensuring better regional balance.

Of course, a united Ireland also offers us a pathway back to the European Union and a solution to many of the problems presented in the near and longer term by Brexit. Tackling the climate emergency effectively requires a holistic, all-Ireland approach, because the environment recognises no borders. We have the opportunity to rebalance and reshape our economy on the basis of a fair and just transition, with full fiscal autonomy and sovereignty to plan a fully-integrated all-Ireland economy and society. We should take it.

I support the Minister's motion to give our Departments the ability to spend in advance of a new Budget next month.

Mr McGrath: I spoke yesterday on the Supplementary Estimates in my capacity as Chair of the Executive Office Committee. I mentioned the importance of issues such as the historical institutional abuse payments to victims, payments to victims and survivors of the Troubles, the need to prepare this place for the way forward in the light of Brexit, and how we fund our offices that will sell Northern Ireland and promote it.

Those are key financial asks for the Executive Office, and they must be given due consideration. I hope that the Budget under consideration reflects those needs and priorities.

However, I want to speak about how this Budget will impact on the residents of South Down and to illustrate some of the multitude of needs felt most acutely by the people of my constituency. I welcome the fact that, nearly four years after being elected an MLA, I have the opportunity to participate in a Budget debate on behalf of the people of South Down, whom I represent.

A quick look at the Budget Bill as it stands shows that the request is for a spend of about £8 billion from the Consolidated Fund, use of resources of £9 billion and some borrowing of in and around £4 billion. Given the amounts of money that we are talking about, I have some concern that the process here is so quick and short that the scrutiny that we can give to the Bill is minimal. Circumstances have led us here, but this is a massive

public spend, and we are not getting the opportunity to scrutinise it properly and have a good, proper discussion about priorities.

With the Vote on Account, where 45% of a Department's budget is given approval, there is a fear that we fall into the trap of simply doing what was done last year. By the time the Budget is set, half of the money is spent, and, as a result, we then cannot set many priorities. I echo the remarks of my colleague from Foyle Mark Durkan about how we need to look forward and deliver two- and three-year Budgets, whereby real change can be effected, because there will not be massive changes made midway through the process.

Budgets feed through to community groups. I remember a community group being given six months' worth of funding and then being told at the end of that time that its funding was being halved. That meant that there was very little money left for it to continue for the rest of that year. That was a predicament. Money had to be found for the group. Those are some of the problems that we have with short-term Budgets. We are constantly voting for just 45% of our money, after a very quick debate that does not allow for proper scrutiny.

11.30 am

We are all too aware of the budget cuts that have left our public services and staff in terrible financial hardship. I would like to put names and faces to those who have been affected and those who could benefit from the Budget having a positive impact. We cannot really say anything about the fact that these institutions were felled for three and a half years. That has left portfolios abandoned, vital projects shelved and, most shamefully, public trust in elected officials decimated. Now is the time to prove that these institutions can work and that they will deliver for the public.

Nowhere is that illustrated more clearly than in our health service. Almost as soon as the institutions were restored, the Health Minister found himself having to address the issue of pay parity and staffing levels for our healthcare workers. We know that those front-line members of staff go over and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis, and their work was repaid by an abuse of their basic rights as staff by previous Health Ministers. Pay parity was achieved, but we can do more. Community-led initiatives and service providers are blazing the trail with new and innovative means of picking up the pieces following the cuts. I think of the great work that is being done, on a smaller scale, in the ADHD Hub in Newcastle, in my South Down constituency. The hub offers a haven for children and families affected by ADHD. It offers a place of welcome and understanding and a place where those living with ADHD can develop their skills and find their talents, which they may not have considered before. Its work has been publicised far and wide, as far as America. People ask why they cannot have that type of provision and why they do not have such a space in their town. However, the hub suffers due to a lack of funding. In spite of that, it powers on with its work and fundraises where it can. It makes me think that the Budget should reflect that type of work and the funding should get right down to ground level to support such initiatives in delivering the work that they do.

I think also of hospital services such as the Downe Hospital. It was a result of community activism and political will with leadership and cohesion of effort and shows

what we can achieve. The SDLP has stood shoulder to shoulder with them as part of that process. Five years ago, tens of thousands of people — activists — took to the street to speak with one voice to save the Downe from budget cuts. That point was heard and adhered to, but today the Downe continues to suffer as a result of a lack of investment. I would like to see the Budget being able to reflect some of the priorities that people are asking for in that hospital. There is a need for investment in a 24-hour accident and emergency department and in the provision of a permanent MRI scanner. Those services cannot be provided because of the lack of funding and because of the difficult funding mechanism that the Budget will continue with. That is why we would like to see a change to it.

Teams in our Ambulance Service work tirelessly in their work, but the service needs investment. I would like to see the Budget reflecting the priority that the community places on ambulance services. Category A calls are supposed to be responded to within eight minutes. That is grand if you live in a city, but I live in a rural constituency where sometimes people have to wait for 75 minutes for a response to a category A call. That has resulted in the death of constituents. It is a direct result of the funding mechanisms that have been put in place. We need to see changes for that, going forward, and I would like to see the Budget take that as a priority and reflect that.

Education is another area that has suffered as a result of the Budgets that we have had in the past. We now have an opportunity, in this Budget, to address that. The Education Minister has, once again, found the issue of teachers' pay on his desk. This has not been previously —

Ms Dillon: I appreciate the Member taking the intervention. On that point, I am glad that the Member across the way, my colleague on the Justice Committee, has finally come to the realisation of the need to fund our public servants, because, in the previous Executive, the Education Minister would not give the teachers even a 1% pay rise because they had the nerve to say that it was not enough. Going forward, we need to ensure that that same Education Minister addresses teachers' pay, because it is a massive issue. Those people give a lot of goodwill. They work, as you said about the health workers, over and above their hours and go way beyond what is expected of them, and it is time that they were paid for that.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Member for her intervention. I suppose that there is a two-pronged approach to that. Obviously, if we had more money, we would be able to address those issues, and that would be good, proper and right. However, it is also about how we manage our money — that is the challenge that the Finance Minister is dealing with — and how that money is rolled out and invested. If we do not invest in the workforce, it will be a difficult area to manage. Teachers have clearly articulated their needs, and it is important that we address them.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. The point is well made that we must invest in our people, but we should also stop spending money on antiquated services and systems that cost us money. Education is one example, given that there are so many sectors to pay for. We should get to the point where we have the money at hand in order to invest in our people in that regard.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Member for his intervention. Again, as part of NDNA, we looked at that, and most

of the parties agreed that there needs to be some sort of restructuring that can properly be funded by the Department and that Budgets such as this better reflect the needs on the ground. When we have all-party support for something, it should quickly become a priority because it is likely to be achieved. Those discussions have taken place as part of the talks process, and they should be delivered as quickly as possible.

When we look at how the Budgets and monitoring round funding have been used, we see that monitoring rounds use money on a very short-term basis because they are not part of a proper Budget. I know that, in my area, in South Down, incredible early years work is being done by Knockevin Special School. It is the result of another community-driven initiative and is an illustration of what can be achieved when people work together. There has been a recent announcement of £10 million of additional money for special education needs. However, that money is not going into providing additional spaces in classrooms, which is actually one of the things that would deal best with the needs out there. I am sure that every MLA has people coming into their constituency office, saying that their children need to be in a special school but the places are not available for them. We need a Budget that reflects that and provides extra places. I fear that we are using the monitoring rounds to put a sticking plaster on a problem, rather than using the Budgets to find a proper, thought-out and well-resourced way of dealing with the issues. Certainly, in education and special needs education, the issue of additional places comes up again and again. I would like to see the Budget being able to provide additional places, where that is possible.

There are other initiatives that the Budget could reflect that would help our schools as well. In my constituency, Teconnaught Cross Community Pre School is currently based in an old building. It spends an average of £200 per month on heating alone, and that is not sustainable. The budget currently allocated to the school just about covers the wages and the daily running costs. With an increased budget, the school could diversify and install renewable means of heating such as solar panels. Why do we not consider incentivising such renewable measures for schools? Where better to get children to learn about green thinking and sustainable energy than in the classroom and in their school. I think that the Budget should reflect ways of helping schools to reduce their bills and to make better use of their budgets in the classroom for the pupil, rather than on heating old buildings, on which literally hundreds and hundreds of pounds are spent every month.

We have to look at the Budget going forward and then think about the past decisions that have been taken but have never materialised. I know, for example, that Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School in Downpatrick was formed after two primary schools were brought together into one old building, with the promise that the other site would be cleared for a new build. That was nearly 10 years ago, and they still wait. Their school is now in an old convent girls' school building that was previously the old boys' secondary school in the town. We do not just hand-me-down clothes in our area; we do hand-me-down school buildings. The promise was there for an additional building, but it has never materialised, and here we go into another Budget, potentially —.

Ms S Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGrath: Yes.

Ms S Bradley: May I add to that list St Louis Grammar School in South Down, which has exactly the same problem?

Mr McGrath: Again, that is a recurring theme that we want Budgets to reflect. Unfortunately, however, we are not getting the opportunity or the scrutiny to be able to discuss those types of initiative. I hope that future Budget processes will allow us to address them.

Infrastructure was a particular casualty of the failings of these institutions three and a half years ago and, indeed, the actions of previous Ministers, some of whom stand beside potholes and uneven road surfaces now for photos, yet they were the very ones who slashed the budget to repair them. That, certainly, is a lesson in the Stormont irony that the public often miss because of the spin process.

On assuming her post as Infrastructure Minister, Nichola Mallon has been faced with another abandoned portfolio and the result of it. She has had to address the ramifications of shelved projects, a crisis in MOT centres, a public transport system in dire straits, slashed budgets for street lights and pothole repairs and much more. She has responded most ably to all of that with a very limited and finite budget. However, were a radically larger infrastructure budget to be allocated, there would be far better days ahead for us all.

Given that the current UK Prime Minister recently announced HS2, which will cost upwards of £89 billion, it is only just and fair that the North receives its fair share under Barnett consequentials. That could be used to radically transform our society. Of course, it could be used to ensure that our response to street lights and potholes is not just the patch jobs that we all see but one that gives people effective and energy-efficient street lighting and roads that can be driven over without breaking suspension springs or getting a flat tyre. That will resonate particularly with the residents of Saul Road in Downpatrick, given the amount of damage that is done to cars there.

Radical infrastructure investment can go much further and can act as a catalyst for much more. Investing in the infrastructure of South Down, in key targeted areas such as Downpatrick, would allow the product of St Patrick to be taken seriously and developed. Investing in the jewel of the tourism crown that is Newcastle would allow the tourist and hospitality sector to flourish and show the people of the North that our hospitality sector extends far beyond Belfast and Portrush — which is, of course, to mean no offence to either of those places. Investing in the connecting areas, such as Drumaness, Loughinisland, Spa, Castlewellan, Leitrim and Kilcoo, will allow people to enjoy all of the natural sites and landscapes that go with them. I want to see investment and budgets for additional picnic areas where seats are available for families to enjoy everything around them. It all boils down to investment in our infrastructure. If we invest in people, we can provide jobs and security.

We also have key maritime infrastructural projects that need to be reflected in this Budget and future Budgets. The harbours at the fishing ports of Kilkeel and Ardglass in South Down have reached their capacity, and, without further government investment, they will stall and their development will be prevented. The concern is that people will go elsewhere if they cannot see scope for development

in the existing provision. It is critical that the harbour in Ardglass is deepened and that there are more mooring spaces for boats. Currently, some of the boats are stuck in the harbour when the tide goes out. Some boats are tethered together as there are no more spaces available, which means that fishermen have the additional peril of having to climb over boats to land their catch. That practice is a health and safety risk that would not be acceptable in any other place, so why should it be acceptable here? I hope that the Budget, in the year ahead, will provide funding that will reflect the needs that there are.

11.45 am

Investing in our natural environment, such as the new build at Our Lady and St Patrick's, is no longer optional. For the sake of current and future generations, we must invest in this, and invest substantially. Will we see this reflected in the Budget in the months ahead?

Also — I am coming near the end — there is climate change, which is an undeniable and irrefutable fact, although some would question that. With rising sea levels, there is coastal erosion. These matters need to concern each of us so that our natural landscape can be enjoyed by all, with houses also protected. I hope that, in the Budget lines that are being established, there will be finance to address those concerns.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. I listened intently to the many projects that the Member outlined as being in need of investment. Does he agree with the sentiment of my colleague Mr Frew that, in light of the current budgetary conditions, it is essential that we prioritise issues of national and regional concern?

Mr McGrath: Yes, indeed — absolutely — but one leads to the other. If we constantly do regional, those who pay their rates and taxes and who live in constituencies need to have their say. I am probably asking for a little indulgence and latitude on the basis that this is the first time that I have had an opportunity to raise issues on behalf of constituents in four years, so there is quite a lot that I am referring to for this one Budget.

It would be wrong of me if I did not speak about one regional issue: youth services. It is critical to invest in the Youth Service. It provides opportunities for young people who would otherwise not get to participate in structured activities or educational outcomes. For many who get involved in those projects, it is an opportunity to shine. It can create a different outcome and direction for them in their lives. In the Education budget, I would like consideration to be given at all times to the Youth Service and additional resources. We need to be able to help our young people.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. I declare an interest as a member of the Scout Association. Does the Member agree that it is important that, when we discuss the issue that he just raised, there is a joined-upness between the Education Authority and the Department — indeed, across government and local government — and that the Youth Service works closely with the national state uniformed organisations to ensure that there is no duplication and wastage?

Mr McGrath: The 'Priorities for Youth' document, which was produced seven or eight years ago, contains that type of direction: that there should not be duplication. In fact,

where the voluntary service is doing the delivery, it should be given priority. That should be enshrined. Of course, the voluntary sector needs to be funded, and the Budget needs to reflect that. It is important that youth services are funded as needed.

As I stated, the Budget for the period ahead is 45% of last year's Budget. I want to end where I started: if we do not have a new approach to the Budget and the Budget process, we will simply come in here and get a few hours to look at the spend of £20 billion and all the priorities for the year ahead. I certainly hope that, once the Budget process is concluded, we can move quickly into the new process and all have our say. We can give our lists, as I have done, in Committees and other places, but we must certainly do what we can for people out there. They want us in here fighting on their behalf for services in their community and the Budget that reflects those.

Mr Nesbitt: As a member of the Committee for the Executive Office, I intend to focus my remarks largely on that part of the Budget Bill. It is a Budget Bill that, I understand, the Ulster Unionist Party will support, albeit with reservations, which I will leave to my party leader to expand on later.

As was said, this is day two of our deliberations on matters budgetary. At the risk of turning this into a rather dull rugby match where the two full backs pump the ball backwards and forwards, I want to return to the Minister's remarks in his concluding address last night, because they are pertinent to the Budget Bill. The Minister seemed to take exception to my references to the cost of the North/South Ministerial Council. In fact, he seemed to suggest that when unionism has nothing else to say, we simply pick on North/South cooperation. The Minister has picked on the wrong unionist here. I do not expect him to hang on my every word, particularly those uttered outside the Chamber, but I assure him that I am well on record as supporting North/South cooperation.

In fact, before I entered politics, I had the pleasure of working closely with the late, great Sir George Quigley, the man who came up with the idea of an eastern seaboard North/South economic corridor. I often heard him tell a story, which may have been apocryphal, about a man from this jurisdiction who manufactured medical bandages. He spent half his life on the road trying to sell them. He went to Scotland, England, Wales and continental Europe. His life was tortured as he looked for sales opportunities. One day, Sir George asked him how he fared in the Republic of Ireland. His surprising response was that he had never crossed the border. With Sir George's encouragement, he did, and he did so well in the Republic that he was able to spend nights at home, put the suitcase back in the attic and buy himself a new car. That is the sort of work that I support from InterTradeIreland, and it has a lot more to do to spread cooperation. Two modern areas on which I support North/South cooperation are the coronavirus and climate emergency. Let me make it clear to the Minister: I support spending on the North/South Ministerial Council, but I just regret that it has not been fully functional because these institutions were not functional over the last three years.

The Minister also wanted to highlight the negative impact of Tory austerity on our budgets and, consequently, our economy. That is fair enough. He has made that point before, and his party makes it at every opportunity. I will just balance that by saying that, in my lifetime, the acts

of greatest austerity that most impacted on our economy were IRA bombs. I declare an interest that, on 25 January 1973, the IRA blew up A Nesbitt and Co Ltd. A Nesbitt was my paternal grandfather, Alfred, who set up a linen business in the centre of Belfast and then handed it over to his two sons, my father and my uncle Jack. For the first 15 years of my life, I was expected to go on to become the third-generation Nesbitt to run that business. However, like David versus Goliath, that little incendiary bomb took on the many, many tons of linen bails and won quite easily. Maybe, Tyson Fury-like, it was no contest. If the Minister does not like my politics and does not like me being here in the Chamber, he knows who to speak to. On a more positive note, the Minister agreed with me that we should switch from a dependency culture to a prosperity agenda. I hope that we can use this Budget to do that, and I will return to that theme in a moment.

I set these two principles against the Budget: is there enough money, and is the money being used to deliver what we expect it to achieve? Is there enough money for the Executive Office? The answer appears to be no, going by our last briefing from TEO officials. The baseline is £55.047 million, but this adds a pressure of £4.974 million. In other words, the officials believe that the budget is about 9% short. You will agree that 9% is a serious figure, but it only scratches the surface of the problems. The problems are the historical institutional abuse inquiry, the victims' pension and EU future relations.

As the officials made clear, it is impossible to know how much money we need to budget for the historical institutional abuse inquiry and redress. I believe that it is between £25 million and £60 million for the next financial year, but we cannot nail it down because there are too many variables. We do not know, for example, how many victims remain. We do not know how many will come forward. We do not know how many will be able to provide sufficient proof to enable them to enter the redress scheme. Finally, we do not know how much money the redress panel will award them. Those are the four variables that officials informed us of last week, but I will add this as a very important fifth: we do not know how much money we will be able to recover from the bodies that ran the institutions in which the abuse occurred.

I have heard a commitment from various Ministers and officials that they will pursue these bodies and say, "You must contribute to the redress, but we will go up front, as an Executive and an Assembly, in providing the money to redress and then, at a later stage, try to recoup it". I suggest to the Minister that we do it rather differently. We know who the bodies are. Why not ask them to now deposit a refundable sum of money that we can draw upon, and, if that sum exceeds their liabilities, when it is all done and dusted, we will return the balance? Why should our population suffer because we are dipping into our own coffers before trying to recoup money from these bodies when we should, in my opinion, be approaching them directly in advance and building a pool of money from which we will take justified sums? As I say, if there is a surplus at the end, we will hand it back because it will be a refundable deposit.

The second issue is the victims' pension, and, once again, there are variables. We do not know how many people will come forward, and, therefore, costs for the next financial year are estimated at between £25 million and £60 million.

That is beyond the baseline, so suddenly we are adding up a very significant sum of money. The Executive Office has a baseline of £55 million, but it has further pressures of £120 million, so it actually needs about £175 million. How does the Minister intend to deal with that very tricky situation?

Ms Dillon: Thank you. I appreciate you giving way. Will you not agree with me that the victims' pension legislation was brought forward by the British Government, that the guidelines were given by the British Government and that the British Government should, therefore, fund it? They expect the Executive to fund it and the Executive to implement it even though they had absolutely no say in how the legislation was arrived at.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for her intervention, and I applaud her work in trying to secure the pension for the victims. I know that she and others among the five main parties and, indeed, the Green Party all worked collaboratively in trying to agree a system. When she says that this was brought forward without any input from the Members of the Assembly, I disagree. I think we did some very good work, although I acknowledge that the final legislation was passed in Westminster. Should we ask Westminster to contribute? Absolutely.

I have huge concerns about how we go forward, and I think the Minister spoke yesterday about going back to Treasury with a begging bowl. We should go to Treasury whenever we have a special case, and, when it comes to legacy issues, we obviously have a special case that does not apply in Scotland, Wales or any of the English regions. We really need to be very careful going forward because, with the rise of English nationalism, they are looking at us much more closely, and, 26 years on from the ceasefires, I think that they are increasingly asking this question: why is Northern Ireland a special case?

I remind the Member that I was involved in the Stormont House talks. I will never forget the night before the then Prime Minister David Cameron was coming over. The five party leaders were called into a meeting by the then First Minister and deputy First Minister, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness. We were given the shopping list of asks that was being presented to the Prime Minister the next morning, and we were all asked to address at least one of the issues. I picked mental health because that is an area that I campaign on, and it is also, of course, a legacy issue. In that document, I saw an ask for childcare, and I was concerned because, first of all, we had £12 million largely unspent and ring-fenced in our budgets for childcare, and, secondly, I did not see how that made us a special case. The Prime Minister came, and, sight unseen, he went through the document, and the first thing he lit on was childcare. He asked this question: "Why have you got childcare needs that we do not have in inner London, Birmingham or Glasgow?" Nobody could answer the question because we do not.

We have the same childcare needs as inner London, Birmingham and Glasgow. Once again, we need to be careful, when we ask for additional moneys from Treasury, that we make a case that distinguishes us from any other region and country of the United Kingdom.

12.00 noon

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that we are really only a basket-case economy? We keep adding to the burden of our financial pressures by putting into budget lines wish lists, deadlines, red lines and other things that we all would like to fund without looking at historical spend and at functions and systems that are antiquated and not fit for purpose. That is what makes us a basket case.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am reluctant to agree that we are a basket case, because I am looking for hope. We need to look to the future, however.

The Budget will allocate money Department by Department: in other words, in silos. We have agreed previously that we are coming out of our silos and moving to an outcomes-based accountability form of government, which means cross-cutting. Simply put, previously, when we had educational underachievement, we looked to the Minister of Education and said, "That is your problem". We now recognise that healthier children do better in school, so we say to the Minister of Health, "It is your problem as well". We know that children in better housing are likely to do better in school, so we say to the Minister for Communities, "It is your problem too, so the three of you should get in the room and start working on it". It means cooperating on budgets, and that is where Steven Agnew's Children's Services Co-operation Act, which he brought in as a private Member, is so valuable.

A third issue that I want to mention relates to the Executive Office budget. To a certain extent, it takes us from the question of whether we have enough money to that of whether we use it properly. I refer to a budget for EU future relations. I quote the Executive Office's aim on future relations, as presented to the Committee last week:

"TEO aims to ensure that the UK Government's negotiation strategy for leaving the EU is aware of, and informed by, a full understanding of the NI issues and implications at every stage."

We are looking at a border down the Irish Sea, so I think that we can conclude that the aim has been a catastrophic failure to date. The aim is not just to ensure that the UK Government are "aware of" our particular needs but to ensure that their strategy is "informed by" them. A border down the Irish Sea does not reflect the UK Government being informed in their strategy.

The points-based immigration system that the Home Office introduced last Tuesday does us no favours, not just over low-skilled labour. We have heard from Hospitality Ulster and the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium that the minimum wage of £25,600 is disastrous for us. No doubt the fishing industry and the agri-food sector would say the same. There is also now an issue with skilled labour. It turns out that there is a shortage occupations list. In other words, there is a list of occupations for which, the Government believe, there are insufficient numbers of appropriately qualified people to take the jobs. That applies in a number of sectors. Last week, I discovered that, although there is a UK-wide shortage occupations list, Scotland has a dedicated, Scotland-only shortage occupations list. Northern Ireland does not. Why not? It turns out that the points-based system that the Home Office brought in last week is based largely on a report

from a group called the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). As early as May 2019, the MAC recommended that Wales and Northern Ireland draw up their own shortage occupation lists, but it appears that we have not. Once again, Northern Ireland appears to be the most affected region of the UK from Brexit but the least prepared. I acknowledge that it is not about giving the budget to our future relations division as much as it is about how it uses the money.

I agree with the Minister, and he agreed with me yesterday when I said that we needed a prosperity agenda. We need to use the Budget to best effect. Let us stop the begging-bowl culture of dependency with the Treasury. I think that the Minister acknowledged yesterday that those days are gone. People have read Sam McBride's book 'Burned' and understand that we took the attitude that non-block grant money and annually managed expenditure was free money and we should fill our boots. We cannot do that any more; we will not be allowed to. This Budget is even more important than those in previous years, because the purse strings are being tightened. Let us have a prosperity agenda. We should use the money not just to make sure that our citizens have a few more quid in their back pocket, important as that is. Prosperity also means that they have a great sense of mental health and well-being, they wake up feeling good about themselves and with a sense of purpose in their lives and they go to bed with a sense of achievement after a day's work.

As I said to Mr Frew, it is important not just that we look at the budgets per Department but that we cooperate across Departments in a cross-cutting manner. To do that, we need a form of political maturity that we may not have seen over the last number of years. It is a maturity that says, "Once the votes are cast, we're no longer political opponents. Whether we like it or not, we're political partners". For the first time in five years, you have five parties in the Executive. What I expect, what my party expects and, I think, what the people out there expect is that, when those Ministers sit round that table and one says, "I've got a problem" and articulates it, a Minister from another party across the table might say, "Well, have you thought of this?", and the Minister with the problem says, "My word, that's a great idea. I wish I had thought of that. Let's do it". I am not sure that that was the case in previous Executives, and I would love to see it in the two years that remain to us.

We need common purpose. We need to make Northern Ireland work. I have never understood why the Minister's party has chosen to describe Northern Ireland as a "failed statelet". As the Minister is probably aware, the first rule of marketing is that, whatever you are trying to sell, make it easy to buy. If we are going to have a referendum — a border poll — in the Republic, what is attractive about saying to people down there, "We want you to put your hand in your pocket to the tune of, say, €2,000 per person per annum to buy a failed statelet"? That is not very attractive to me. Let us work to make Northern Ireland work, to make it a more attractive place.

The Budget will go with a draft Programme for Government that is based on outcomes; there is outcomes-based accountability. That idea was invented by a man called Mark Friedman, who wrote a book entitled 'Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough'. Mr Friedman came to this Building before devolution collapsed and addressed the Committee

for the Executive Office. He told us about how outcomes-based accountability government works. One of the colleagues whom he brought with him was a retired politician from Canada. She talked about her provincial Government at one point having to impose austerity measures, including a 10% cut across the board for every agency in the criminal justice system. She said that those agencies — the police, the court service, the youth service and probation — all sat around a table and decided that a 10% haircut across the board was not the best way to do business, so they went back to the provincial Government and said, "OK, cut the amount that you want to cut, but don't make it 10% per organisation. Don't cut that organisation at all. We'll take 15%. They'll take 17%. You get the same saving, but, we reckon, we'll deliver a better service than a simple 10% across the board". That is what they did, and they delivered a better service. That is my test for the Budget, the Assembly and the Executive: are we mature enough to say, on occasions, "Cut me a bit more, because the greater good will be served by not cutting him or her"? That is a big challenge, but, if we rise to it, we will deliver.

Alfred Nesbitt and Company Limited finished a long time ago, but my father kept a few bits and pieces at home that survived the fire. In my office upstairs, I have a blank invoice, and it reads:

"A Nesbitt & Co Limited, Linen Manufacturers"

Underneath that line, my grandfather had something printed that proves that he was a curmudgeonly old Victorian. It said:

"Deduction of odd pence not allowed"

Maybe that is the problem here politically. Maybe we need to deduct the odd political penny between our parties; maybe a little spirit of generosity will go a long way.

Mr Muir: I thank the Minister and the Finance Committee's Deputy Chair for their contributions. I speak as the Alliance Party's finance spokesperson. I wish to comment on general expenditure issues relating to the Bill, but, before that, there are important governance issues that need to be addressed.

There has been limited time to scrutinise the Bill, but Alliance will support the Bill and the accelerated passage due to the realities that we face following the restoration of the Assembly just over six weeks ago. However, we seek ministerial assurance that the granting of accelerated passage will not set a precedent. A statement from the Minister about how the lateness in approaching all of these matters will affect the setting of the regional rate and the dispatch of rates bills would also be useful, alongside a pledge that we will not again be in the same position, leaving it to the last minute to strike a regional rate and post out bills.

As the Budget Bill we are debating today states, a Budget (No. 2) Bill for the full 2020-21 financial year will be done by the Assembly in June on the basis of a Budget position agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive, so, today, we are largely looking back rather than forward. One aspect of our budgeting that has been commented on by others is the fact that we are again dealing with short-term, one-year budgeting and the problems, the missed opportunities and the silo departmental working that that involves. I ask the Minister for assurances on when multi-year budgeting

will arrive, what planning work will be necessary to deliver it and how effective consultation and engagement will occur to ensure that multi-annual budgets are shaped by the needs of communities, people and businesses. I make those comments in the context of the Budget Bill that we are debating today and the lack of opportunity for effective consultation and engagement. The move towards multi-year budgeting is something that all of us would want to support, but we want to make sure that that is the way that communities can be engaged with and their views ascertained.

In considering the matters in front of us and looking back on the expenditure that has occurred for which legislative authority is being sought, there are many issues that we could touch on. Yesterday and today, we have witnessed discussion on a wide and varied range of topics. The “sins of the last Executive”, if I can quote the Finance Minister, were often recalled yesterday and have been recalled again today. There are many sins, not just from the last Executive but from many before. It is not true that there are only some sinners in the Chamber; there are sinners on both sides of the House. As Mr Storey might agree, there are many sinners throughout the Chamber.

RHI, Red Sky, Research Services Ireland and the social investment fund: the list is long and becomes even longer when you consider the many Audit Office reports and PAC inquiries. Many of the scandals have been investigated, and one is the subject of a public inquiry. The need to learn lessons from each to ensure that the mistakes are not repeated is something that the public rightly demand. People are understandably angered when the mistakes of the past are repeated. The independent fiscal council detailed in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ document, which was understandably pushed for by the UK Government and Treasury, will play an important role, but it is no substitute for leadership by MLAs. We can have all the oversight mechanisms that we want, but, unless the Assembly, the Executive and Ministers are prepared to deal with difficult decisions, we are just sailing ahead, taking on water and going towards the rocks.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. I am happy to talk about sinners and the remedy for sin, but I will maybe leave that to another day in the House.

Will the Member accept that, although we can make decisions in this House, we need to answer the question of when we are going to have the public inquiry on the back of the Audit Office report? I referred to that matter yesterday. How many times do we have to repeat it? It makes the RHI look like a small piece. It is a figure of £700 million, not as a result of the mistakes that politicians made but something more fundamental. Kieran Donnelly has made it clear. Are we going to ignore that? Are we going to continue to go over the same old mantra and the same old stuff that we hear in this House day in, day out? It is action we need; it has to be right across the piece; and, maybe, on 13 March, Judge Coghlin will give us the eye-opener that will be about not only the political problems but the institutional problems.

12.15 pm

Mr Muir: I thank the Member for his intervention. Obviously, it is for Ministers to take action on the establishment of inquiries. I note that some Ministers have been reluctant to do that in relation to some very serious

issues such as illegal dumps. I think that it is important that all Members, especially those on the PAC, fulfil their role of providing that scrutiny.

The reality is that the luxury of dodging difficult decisions is now firmly gone. If there is anything that the last financial year should have taught us, it is of the price being paid by not taking decisions and how that affects services, workers, the public and businesses. Failing to take decisions affects everyone. Frankly, it is a dereliction of duty. We cannot legitimately go to the UK Treasury looking for more money when we are not willing to look in our own backyard and sort out the scandals in our midst.

RHI, Red Sky and others are indeed scandals, but, arguably, the biggest scandal that we have always faced is the cost of division. Tackling the cost of division is by far the most significant, long-term financial challenge facing this Executive and this Budget. Estimated previously to be up to nearly £1 billion a year, in the context of the current financial circumstances, we find ourselves in the position where the imperative to act is not just moral or ethical but financially unavoidable. Either we fail to act and shamefully see public services collapse or we pick up the courage and prove to the public and Her Majesty’s Treasury that we are at last willing to take the difficult decisions to transform lives, attract investment and ensure that spend is focused on objective need rather than to maintain age-old sectarian divisions. That is the challenge of this Budget, and that is the challenge of this Assembly within this mandate.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Muir: Yes.

Mr Storey: Will the Member call St Mary’s College a sectarian project?

Mr Muir: No, I will not, but my point is about tackling the cost of division and the reflection of our history. We need to make sure that we are building a future that is a shared future. It is about taking those difficult decisions. We have a very, very divided society, and we have to be able to challenge that and to transform that. There are lots of different projects that have either been avoided or been pushed back upon, and we need to be able to take action on that.

The costs of division are many but are perhaps broken down into four categories: direct costs, such as policing of disturbances; indirect costs, such as providing duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community, either implicitly or explicitly; hidden costs, such as the pressures on the housing sector from demographic imbalances; and the opportunity costs of lost inward investment and tourism. I welcome the Finance Minister’s recent statement in the form of a written response detailing:

“The New Decade, New Approach document acknowledges the significant challenge that arises in seeking to tackle the financial burden associated with delivering public services in a divided society.

As set out in the document, I would expect that, in developing new policies and, over time, in reviewing existing ones, the Executive will take steps to eliminate all such costs. In the first instance it will be for

individual Ministers to ensure that the services they provide are appropriate and cost effective.”

I welcome that statement, but we need more; much, much more. A programme of ambitious actions and resulting savings is one way, I hope, that Executive Ministers could proceed. As the Member outlined, I feel that, for example, the Minister for the Economy needs to bring forward plans for a single teacher training college. We cannot keep avoiding those issues. Let us see the Minister of Education ensure that the independent review of education provision gets cracking and delivers prompt and ambitious recommendations that everyone in this Chamber is willing to act upon. The additional costs of our education system can no longer be afforded. Similarly, shared housing should be the norm going forward.

I did not join the Assembly to see things trundle along as they have done in the last financial year and as part of the budgeting process. I joined to change things, to achieve a new Northern Ireland where we can live, work and socialise together, devoid of the old divisions carved out in the past and in which we live in the present.

Many young people cannot understand why we continue to pour in thousands and thousands and thousands of pounds to sustain a divided society when change is possible. It is up to us to ensure that the financial year ahead is different and that the one that is about to pass is not repeated. We cannot afford to allow that to happen.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): My first remarks will be made in respect of the Justice Committee, and I will then move on to speak in my role as an MLA for Lagan Valley.

The Committee has not yet had an opportunity to undertake detailed scrutiny of the Department’s budget, but we received an overview briefing on its budget position. That included key budget allocations for 2019-2020 and details of the pressures and challenges that the Department expects to face in the next financial year. We have also received overview briefings from departmental agencies and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is in that context that I wish to comment.

In respect of the 2019-2020 Budget, the Committee understands that the Department of Justice was provided with funding to cover a range of pressures in 2019-2020. That included £32 million towards employer pension contributions — an issue that applied across other aspects of public service — and £11.3 million for pressures, including legacy inquest proposals. The Police Service received allocations in the region of £42 million in-year for issues such as tackling paramilitarism, additional Brexit funding and injury on duty.

The additional funding for injury on duty was reallocated internally from other easements in the Department of Justice’s budget. The Department also surrendered approximately £3 million in the last monitoring round, primarily from compensation services and other end-of-year easements. Taking all that into consideration, the Department has advised that it is on target to remain within budget for the remainder of this financial year.

Moving into the next financial year, the Department informed the Committee that it faces pressures in the region of £67.3 million to stand still. Correspondence from the Minister to the Committee appears to suggest that

that amount represents the minimum level of financial pressures facing the Department’s budget. The Police Service alone has cited pressures in excess of £53 million. That relates to pay pressures, injury on duty, estate maintenance backlog and essential provision of body armour and helmets.

The Minister has advised that a number of the pressures facing the Department — for example, legacy-related costs — are too significant to fund from its own budget, and resources for those will be sought from the centre. Those figures have, therefore, been removed from the £67.3 million pressures quoted to the Committee.

Leaving aside those issues for which funding will be sought from the centre, the anticipated pressures equate to 6% of the Department’s opening budget position for 2019-2020. This will obviously be very challenging, and it is difficult to see how pressures of this level can be absorbed without impacting on delivery.

The development of the Executive’s Programme for Government will provide an opportunity for the Department to clearly set out its priorities. The Committee fully intends to make sure that resources are aligned to achieve maximum impact and better outcomes for the public. Invaluable work on the pilot substance misuse court, the development of a mental health court and case progression officers to address the causes of offending and to ensure cases progress more quickly through the justice system are welcome initiatives, but funding will be required to sustain them. Funding for the substance misuse court originally came from the Department of Finance’s cross-cutting programme, but the Department of Justice has now taken on responsibility for financing that project.

In addition, the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ document includes a range of commitments for the Department of Justice, which, at this early stage, have not yet been fully costed and for which additional funding is as yet unclear. The Committee has been informed, for example, that the annual cost of 600 police officers, once recruited and trained, is £40 million, but there may also be associated costs of more staff to support the additional officers and capital requirements for additional fleet vehicles. The Minister advised that she will be able to commit to take forward the New Decade, New Approach commitments only when the Department of Justice has received sufficient funding to manage its existing inescapable pressures.

The Department is likely also to face additional funding requirements that relate to our exit from the European Union. It is essential that all available Brexit-related funding be drawn down so that the Department and its bodies will not be expected to provide funding from its normal budget.

Finally, I want to draw attention to the cost of providing the separated regime in Northern Ireland’s prisons, which is estimated to be in the region of £2 million a year. The burden falls on the Department of Justice, but it is the Secretary of State who makes decisions on the separated regime. For that reason, the Committee has written to the Secretary of State to request that the cost be transferred to the Northern Ireland Office.

The Minister of Justice confirmed that in addition to further briefings on the 2020-21 budget, which will take place over the coming months, her Department will engage with the Committee regularly throughout the year. As a

minimum, that will happen in line with in-year monitoring schedules, but there will also be engagement on any other specific issues that the Committee wishes to discuss. The Committee looks forward to more detailed engagement with the Department of Justice on those matters. I have no doubt that the Committee will interrogate them. I have no doubt that the Minister of Finance and his Department will, as they engage in bilaterals, also interrogate departmental bids. I am sure that all Departments make bids in a properly costed fashion, but it is always good to have a fresh look at those. I am sure that the Department of Finance will do that, as will Committee members, to ensure that the figures stack up.

I will make some broader points now. In doing so, I remove myself from speaking in my official role as Chairman of the Committee lest some of my subsequent points be controversial and not necessarily reflective of the Committee's views. It is important that we look at a wide spectrum of issues that face the justice system. Legacy is one, and it is cited in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. Initial costs for that were £150 million, which, I think, nobody regards as being anywhere close to what, ultimately, will be necessary. Leaving aside what, ultimately, will come out of the legislative processes, it is vital that, when it comes to the financing of all that, it does not fall to the Executive and Department of Justice to fund it. These are cases that need to be made and that relate to the past. Until we deal with the past, it will continue to insert toxic poison into our future. It needs to be addressed, but the cost should not be to the detriment of the present.

I want to raise some governance and audit issues that have been mentioned by many. I do not intend to rehearse them, because we can be in danger of navel-gazing and trying to score points. My party can do that against Sinn Féin and other parties. They can do it against my party, and so that cycle would continue. The public expects us to try to deliver for them in the here and now, and to move on from that. I will just say that the RHI report has not yet been published. I have noted a lot of commentary from Members opposite, including the Minister whose Department commissioned the inquiry. I am surprised by the level of the Minister's commentary, given that the report has not yet been published and its findings have not yet been made public by the judge. Yes, there is the court of public opinion, and journalists have commented widely on it, but Members would do well to wait until we get the independent final report. We certainly believe, as our leader says, that there are lessons to be learned from it. We will also have to look at it with regard to other people and parties, not just the current Minister, who, I know, sat on the former Minister for the Economy when this was being handled. I would be surprised — not that I know — if he has not had to give evidence to the inquiry, yet he has gone on to make comments about it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member is straying into the territory of doing what he criticises others for doing. Maybe he could make his remarks in the context of the Budget Bill.

Mr Givan: I will certainly do that. It is important that we await the outcome of the inquiry. There will be governance issues in how the Budget will be taken forward.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: Let me just conclude the point. Then, I will be happy to give way.

The report will also reveal issues that my colleague for North Antrim mentioned, which relate to capacity and competence in the Civil Service. It is right that we await the findings, because it will have implications. Advice that current Ministers receive may well come from some of the very officials who could be named in the report, and the findings might be against them. We would do well to await the report's final publication. I give way to Mr Frew.

12.30 pm

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He will know that a Budget is very important for running Northern Ireland and for this place. The fact is that we did not have a Budget from the previous Sinn Féin Minister, and the excuse used today was RHI. How does the Member find that explanation? Is it not the truth that the reason we did not have a Budget from the last Sinn Féin Minister is because it would have been riddled with Tory austerity and that party could not face bringing a Budget because of the pressure that People Before Profit were bringing to them in their heartlands?

Mr Givan: I welcome that this Minister is bringing forward a Budget. I note that the previous Minister is not here. I met him in a ministerial role that I had, and he indicated to me that he would be around for a very long time and that it would be very important to have a very good working relationship with him because he was going to have a big future when it came to the government of this place. I note that he is not here to take that forward and that he did not bring forward a Budget.

I will raise some issues from the Lagan Valley constituency. I will touch on three themes that relate to the Budget. One is education, something that is very important to all of us here. I serve on the board of governors of three schools: Pond Park Primary School; Ballymacash Primary School; and Laurehill Community College. When it comes to looking at the budget for the future, we can see that pressures are faced not just in those schools but, as Members will know from their own constituency, exist on the budgets for all our schools, so there is a need for greater resource through the capital and current funding that is provided to our education system. When the Education Minister makes the case, as I have no doubt he will, to the Finance Minister, he will say that there is a need for additional resourcing.

The common funding formula is a very complicated formula with multiple layers that award funding to particular schools. The age-weighted pupil unit needs to be increased across the board, and the other factors attract additional funding. As an example, the principal of Maghaberry Primary School, a school in my constituency, has spoken at length at various public forums about the funding issues facing that school. The school has fewer than 10% of its pupils with an entitlement to free school meals, and when it comes to providing the budget that is needed, it is wholly inadequate, yet it is at full capacity. Here we have a school that meets the need of the local community, meets the criteria for what the Department says is necessary for a sustainable school in the future, yet the budget is not meeting the need, and that is something that needs to be addressed.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. For many years we have had the view that the use of free school

meals is a blunt instrument that actually creates other inequalities. In fact, it discriminates against those schools whereby now they find themselves in the position that, even though their numbers, as you outlined, are in a strong position, the funding is not reflective of that. So numbers no longer guarantee that you will have the financial resources. I certainly will await the outcome of a review that I understand the Minister of Education is doing. I hope that one of the issues coming out of that review will be addressing the imbalance that there is in the use of free school meals as a blunt instrument to deal with how you fund our schools.

Mr Givan: The Member makes a valuable contribution. I know that, from his previous role in education, he knows more about this issue than I do. The issue with free school meals has a read-across not just for the Budget, but in being a criterion that is used in the referral of children for psychological assessments. If you need to be assessed for special educational need, class is no discriminator, yet it is when it comes to the allocation of assessments. Maghaberry Primary School is allowed to put forward only one pupil because it has fewer than 10% of its pupils with an entitlement to free school meals. The school is in a part of the constituency that is not regarded, like other parts of this Province, as being a particularly affluent area, yet the system that is in place is not meeting the need. We need more resources put into education as a whole. We then need to ensure that the way in which those resources are divided up is fair and equitable. I make the case to the Finance Minister that the funding of education should be a priority.

In terms of capital, many schools require basic maintenance to be carried out, yet there is not the funding available to meet that need. We need to put in more money to build new schools. In my constituency, Dromore High School needs a new building for 1,000 pupils, and enrolment in its catchment area continues to grow. The capital for that needs to be made available to the Department of Education.

Special educational need presents a huge problem for the Department of Education. In Lagan Valley, the number of pupils who have a statement of special educational need now sits at 1,109. In 2015-16, it was 946. The number is therefore increasing, and that creates additional pressure, because the school has to provide the necessary funding for classroom assistants. In Lagan Valley alone, just short of 4,000 children are on the special educational needs register. All require individual educational plans, and resources have to be provided for those who meet that need in schools, but there is not the funding available.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: Yes. I will give way.

Ms Armstrong: Given the special educational needs pressures in his constituency and mine, does the Member agree that it is fundamental that we have a root-and-branch reform of education urgently to make sure that those children are provided with the best possible education to meet their needs?

Mr Givan: I do. Reform cuts across many of our public services. Doing things in the way in which we have done them in the past is not going to free up the amounts of money that we need for the future. Those who require special educational need assistance must have that need met. There is a legal obligation that assessment should be carried out within 26 weeks. Currently, 2,108

children are being assessed for a statement of special educational need. Of those, 944 have waited longer than 26 weeks — that is 45%. There are valid exceptions that justify why some have to wait longer, but within the 944 who are waiting longer than 26 weeks, over 50% do not have the exceptional circumstances that justify the wait. Those children are being failed because there is not the resource on the psychological side of the Education Authority to meet their needs. When they do not have their needs identified, interventions cannot then be made. The difficulties that the children encounter then need to be addressed later in life, if they are addressed, and with that comes additional cost. All of the evidence shows that early intervention is a better outcome both for the individual and for public resources, because the need is met earlier.

Another funding issue that I want to touch on concerns a sporting infrastructure capital scheme that I would like to see developed. The £36 million subregional stadia programme goes back to a 2011 Executive commitment by the Executive. That programme is additional to the regional stadia programme, which dealt with the three main sporting stadiums. The Minister will hopefully be able to roll out the subregional stadia programme. However, we need to see a new programme developed, where, at grassroots level, sporting clubs can get the capital that they need to provide the facilities that are increasingly in demand.

I will give one example. The Minister was able to visit Ballymacash Rangers Football Club, which has developed a sports academy. The first phase of the project, costing approximately £450,000, is nearing completion. A number of phases need to be rolled out beyond that, but in order to do that, we need to have a capital fund available. I would like to see, within the Department for Communities, a scheme developed for small capital programmes of that nature. It is important that the way that it is devised and the criteria which are used are looked at. There are a number of recommendations that could be considered, one of which is partnering with local authorities to try to incentivise the sharing of the capital schemes. Tying in the sports bodies so that they have to make a contribution as well is something that I would like to see take place, but also community partnership. Many of us face requests from constituents. They say, "We need this facility". They make an approach to central government —

Mr McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will give way in a moment. They make requests to local authorities. Often, the question is, "Where do you get the funding from?". The example that I cited, Ballymacash, developed a community investment scheme. They raised £112,000 through the local community, which is in a working-class estate in a loyalist area of Lisburn, buying into the model through a shares-type scheme. They raised £112,000. Very few community groups will ever come forward with that type of model, and we should be trying to incentivise it. When I look at the Budget for future provisions, I would like to see a scheme that incentivises that.

Mr McCann: Does the Member agree that added to that are the serious problems that have arisen for many local clubs by the IFA's demand that they have to improve facilities or face going out of the league? Part of what he is talking about needs to be fitted into whatever provision is made.

Mr Givan: I agree entirely with the Member. New standards are having to be met to get access to particular leagues and, if you do not meet them, you are not able to take part. When those new barriers are being created, albeit some of them for justifiable reasons, we need to have support. The sporting bodies have a responsibility themselves. Some of them have a significant amount of funding coming in, and they need to be designing schemes as well, but that partnership approach between central government, sporting bodies and local authorities would help take us to another space with regard to the kind of community infrastructure that exists. When we look at addressing things like —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will in just a moment. When we look at addressing things around well-being, mental health and community cohesion, all of us can show examples in our constituencies where these organisations provide a purpose for people. If we want to try to give people a motivation and an aspiration, we need to have the infrastructure in place within those communities to do it. That is why we need a scheme like this that can try and do more than what we have been doing so far.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I very much agree with the comments that have been made about the moneys for sports grounds and intermediate league standards and so on, but equally I agree with the comment that the Member made a short time ago about moneys and a joined-up approach across government and local government. However, when the edict comes from UEFA to the Irish Football Association, and it passes that on to clubs, the association must also make some provision. Indeed, it should provide finance, as happens on the mainland with the English FA. These clubs cannot be expected to fund this on their own. I have raised this issue on many occasions with Belfast City Council, and will do so again on Friday, because councils simply do not have the money to meet the obligations that are being set down in an arbitrary way by UEFA.

Mr Givan: The Member is absolutely right. It needs to get down to that grassroots level, not just dealing with the bigger sporting clubs within whatever sporting fraternity they are operating in.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will, but I am not going to take any more interventions because I realise I have probably been speaking for longer than I had anticipated.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He raises a very good issue with regard to youth football clubs which maybe cater for nine to 12 teams, with hundreds of children involved, as opposed to a football team with a squad of 15 to 20 players. There is a massive difference. Youth football needs to be supported. I commend Lisburn for its youth set-up. My two sons played right throughout youth football and played many a time in the Lisburn leagues on a Saturday morning.

Mr Givan: As did I, back in the day, Mr Deputy Speaker. Again, the Member makes a very important point.

12.45 pm

The final point that I want to raise relates to infrastructure development and the capital requirements, not just on

the resource side. I want to speak about my experience of the procurement process and the time that it takes to deliver schemes. In my constituency, I highlight, in my constituency, the need to increase the car-parking facility at Moira train station. The Executive and the Assembly rightly want to encourage the use of public transport, yet, if you go to use Moira train station, you have to park way up the public road, towards the main street. How will we encourage more people to get on our trains if we do not have basic park-and-ride facilities? Capital resource needs to be given to that kind of development, but we also need to look at the delivery of it. The situation at Moira train station has gone on for years. Development junctions in my constituency should have been delivered many years ago. One of them, in the Ballymacash area — there is a planning issue associated with the Lisburn and Dunmurry 1 (LD1) development area — still has not been delivered, and that is creating problems. It is not just about finance but about the systems in place for the delivery of the finance that ultimately gets allocated to it.

In conclusion, I make one final point in respect of the Brexit issue, which some Members have touched on. When we look at that issue, we see that it is important that we do not have the barriers North/South. We do not want to have barriers on a North/South basis, but neither do we want east-west barriers. When it comes to demands that may be made around infrastructure requirements to do with checks and so on, I do not believe that the Executive should be responsible for funding that. The Assembly voted unanimously against what has ultimately transpired when it comes to Brexit, so we should not pick up the financial implications of any of that. It is important that the Finance Minister makes the case to Treasury, if he is not already doing so, that any east-west issues should not fall on this place to deal with. That includes not just public services but the private sector. Any regulations that may require checks and regulatory burden should not have a financial impact on either the public or the private sector. I welcome the commitments made by the First Minister and by the deputy First Minister, Michelle O'Neill. When they were in Cardiff, Michelle O'Neill said that we do not want any barriers to trade in our local economy, and that was in an east-west context.

My final point on that is that the Member of Parliament for South Down seems to be making some contradictory remarks in respect of the implementation of the Ireland protocol.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I venture that we should restrict our comments to the Bill. I have given you fair latitude, but we have to restrict our comments to the context of the Budget Bill that is before us, please.

Mr Givan: The Speaker's Chair has been very generous to all Members, and we appreciate that, Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Well, that is it [*Laughter.*]

Mr Givan: It is important that we as an Executive and an Assembly have a unified approach when it comes to trying to have that unfettered access in an east-west relationship. If there were any barriers, that would have implications for the public purse in respect of trade. We should take forward that approach. With that, I conclude.

Mr McGuigan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural

Affairs): I welcome the opportunity today as vice chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the Committee's views. I understand the similarities between the debate today and the one yesterday, and the Committee Chair does too. Whilst he thought that it was important that the views of the Committee were read into Hansard, he thought that, today, they should be read in with a south Derry accent.

The Committee received an oral briefing from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on the 2019-2020 Budget on 13 February 2020. It was clear from that briefing that preparation — *[Interruption.]* I hope that that is not the Chair ringing to give off to me. It was clear from the briefing that preparation for Brexit was and remains a priority for the Department, with £13.9 million of additional money from the 2019-2020 Budget and £312.4 million being allocated for a no-deal Brexit scenario, as well as staff salaries. Brexit has added immense pressure on the Department, so much so that the number of staff required to deal with it is set to rise to 454, alongside staff costs of £23.6 million in 2020-21, if DAERA's Budget requests are successful. A large number of those posts will require staff specialism that currently does not exist in the Department.

The largest cost in the Department from 2019-2020 remains salaries and wages of £125 million, with only £46.6 million allocated to programmes, and I will elaborate on that later. The Department has three non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) — the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the Loughs Agency and the Livestock and Meat Commission — which require £34.5 million to fund. The Committee heard some detail around the £46.6 million allocated to programmes, the largest of which is around £18.9 million for TB compensation, with a further £8.8 million spent on fees for private vets who carry out the tuberculosis testing. Alongside that, there is a considerable sum spent on testing for TB by in-house vets.

Members noted that the biggest NDPB is the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, with the largest budget totalling £32.4 million. The issue of royalty income from the institute raised a concern specifically about the collection of those royalties and how that has been problematic for the institute in the past. The Committee recognised that that matter is now subject to legal proceedings, and we wait with interest to see how it unfolds.

The Committee was somewhat concerned to hear that there had been reduced requirements in the January monitoring round, with £12 million of resource, £1.6 million of resource depreciation impairment and £4 million in capital being surrendered. Clarification from officials revealed that the £12 million of resource was a combination of money from no-deal preparations, reduced requirement for TB compensation and a number of one-off easements. There was also a sum of £0.9 million of additional generated income from Forest Service and the regulatory aspect of the NI Environment Agency, which was over and above what had been forecast.

Another area on which Brexit will have an impact and on which the Committee will be focused is the Department's budget and replacement funding. That will be a challenge for the Department, particularly in relation to CAP funding, which is currently worth £293 million in the North. While the Committee was pleased to hear that funding had been secured for this year from the British Treasury, we are

concerned about what will happen in following years. EU replacement funding will come directly from the British Treasury, but questions remain over how much we will get as a percentage share and whether it will be ring-fenced. In addition to that, there are questions about the prosperity fund and its role in replacing rural development funding.

The replacement of the animal and public health information system (APHIS) is a serious area of concern for the Committee. That system allows farmers to register cattle movements and other matters and is a vital component in ensuring compliance with animal health and traceability measures. It has great importance in our international agri-food trade. In 2016, the Department commenced a project with the aim of introducing a new system known as the NI food animal information system (NIFAIS). There was an expected completion date of 2018, but, because of major concerns with the contractor, including a high level of software defects, the deadline was missed. To date, it has cost £10.9 million. The Department has requested a further £2.3 million in its capital bids for the 2020-21 Budget, and the Committee will continue to watch with interest how that situation unfolds. We have requested further information and expect to be kept up to date on progress as time allows.

The Committee realises that many rural areas and communities have poor internet connectivity due to unreliable and slow broadband. That is an unacceptable situation that is particularly concerning when the Department is encouraging farmers to complete forms online, use the APHIS system and reduce paperwork. Effective access to broadband can also help with issues such as rural isolation, which has a knock-on impact on physical and mental health. We consider the Department's allocation of funding to Project Stratum and rural broadband as vital for our rural communities and look forward to hearing about its progress.

From an environmental perspective, the illegal dump at Mobuoy is a major threat to the environment, producing hazardous contamination in the area and beyond. Tackling the problem has been ongoing for some time, and many Members will be aware of that. The Department has submitted a bid for £0.9 million for the Mobuoy remediation project, and the Committee will, no doubt, revisit the issue.

The Committee values the opportunity to scrutinise the Department's planned expenditure and delivery of associated projects. I look forward to hearing from the Department as it continues to update the Committee on all aspects of budgetary information to assist in undertaking that scrutiny. Environmental protection and the climate emergency will be important work in Committee. We hope for funding to address those issues, particularly an independent environmental protection agency and a climate Act, as detailed in the recent new deal, the name of which I forget.

I thank the officials in the Finance Department and the Minister for preparing the Budget and the legislation and the officials in the AERA Committee for preparing the remarks that I have made today.

In my personal capacity, given some of the commentary today and yesterday in the Budget debate, I got involved in elected politics to try to make positive change, to help the most vulnerable in society in a positive way and to protect and enhance our public services. It is impossible to make any comments on last year's Budget, this year's Budget

or, indeed, future Budgets without talking about 10 years of Tory austerity in the North and its impact on our public services, particularly health, education and transport. As an elected representative for over 20 years to this and other institutions, I have to say that it has been noticeable, particularly over those 10 years, the negative impact that those budgets have had on the most vulnerable. I have noticed that as an elected representative. Unfortunately, the people who notice it more and are most impacted on by this policy are those coming to my constituency office who are on long waiting lists, unable to get care packages for their loved ones and struggling to feed or clothe their families, not to mention the lack of investment in our schools, as many Members have pointed out, and the impact that that has on the education of our children. There are also clear problems in our infrastructure and roads, there is a need for increased active travel, and there is the vital need of climate emergency and investment against climate change.

That is the impact of 10 years of Tory austerity and, I suppose, 100 years of partition. I noticed, in yesterday's debate and again today, a false sense of smug satisfaction about the state of the UK economy and how good it is. There was no mention of the impact on our public services here, on our vulnerable and on our working class.

Ms Dillon: Does the Member agree that that just proves the point that this was British Tory policy and nothing to do with not having the money to invest here?

Mr McGuigan: I agree, and I will mention that later. I was saying that the silence in relation to that, perhaps from some Members opposite, was because of their embarrassment at having in previous years supported austerity budgets in the North and propped up a Tory government and at their relationship that allowed that to happen.

The mark of any great economy, if you want to talk about it in those terms, or any Government or institution of power has to be measured by how it uses its wealth and treats its citizens. We talked endlessly yesterday and again today about choices or mature decisions. Cutting public services, which adds people to a waiting list, keeps people on trolleys in hospitals, damages our education, diminishes transport, impacts on our climate, increases food banks et cetera is not a hard or mature decision: it is a bad decision. They are bad decisions for us, they are bad decisions for the people whom we represent, and they are wrong. Tory austerity may be the choice of that political party, but it should not be ours.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Order. Sorry to interrupt you in full flow. The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 1.00 pm. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. The debate on the Second Stage of the Budget Bill will resume at 3.30 pm, when the Member will resume his contribution.

Mr McGuigan: I had only 30 seconds left.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I did not know that [Laughter.]

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Stalford] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Member to ask the first question, I must inform the House that oral question 12 and topical question 5 have been withdrawn.

Fiscal Balance

1. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the fiscal balance between revenue raised and public expenditure in each of the last three years. (AQO 178/17-22)

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated the net fiscal balance to be £9.7 billion in both 2016-17 and 2017-18 and £9.4 billion in 2018-19. However, about £3 billion of that relates to so-called non-identifiable spending. That is made up of things like British Government debt repayment and military forces, which are not specific to this region. There is also an accounting adjustment of over £3 billion that is attributed to the North. Setting that aside, that leaves a gap of £3.3 billion between the revenue that is raised locally and expenditure that is clearly identified as benefiting citizens here.

Mr Givan: The figure of £9.7 billion and the most recent one of £9.4 billion as being benefits that Northern Ireland has as being part of the United Kingdom — they show the wealth that that great Union brings to this place — are of significant value. The figures would equate to the budgets of the Departments of Health, Education, Justice and Communities combined if we did not receive the support that we do from the Treasury. Given that the debt that exists for the Irish Government is the third highest in the world per capita at over €200 billion, given the crises in health and housing that led to his party getting the election success that it did and given the research that the University of Liverpool carried out that shows that support for Irish unity is only 29%, is it not time that Sinn Féin got off the issue of a border poll and moved to making this place work for the benefit of all our people, with this country remaining within the United Kingdom?

Mr Murphy: I congratulate the Member for managing to ignore the answer that I gave him and go on with whatever he intended to say. It is a skill in itself.

The ONS says that public spending that directly benefits citizens here is £21.8 billion, while the taxes raised here are £18.5 billion. That, for me, is the immediate gap of £3.3 billion that needs to be bridged, and that is why £9 billion is not the reality in cash terms. ONS adds in that a share of that money is spent by London on things like defence and British Government debt, and then it makes a complex accounting system to make the books balance overall. That is not spending that the Executive or most of our citizens would ever see. While I know that he wants to cling to the larger figure, it is actually just an accountancy

process. As ONS, which provides that £9 billion figure, says, the difference between what is spent directly for citizens here and the taxes raised is £3.3 billion.

Mr O'Toole: On a related topic, the Minister has talked a little bit in the past about the creation of an independent fiscal commission a little bit along the lines of what they have in Scotland. There are a range of views and depictions of public spending in Northern Ireland and its position relative to the United Kingdom Exchequer. Does the Minister agree that an independent fiscal commission with proper statutory underpinnings and economic forecasting powers will be able to give some clarity to the fiscal position of Northern Ireland in the long term?

Mr Murphy: I thank him for his question. There are two propositions at play here. One is a fiscal council that provides the type of service that he outlined, and it is important, because one of the issues we have dealt with here for some time is the fact that there is no clarity around taxes that are raised here and no clarity on some of the bigger corporations that do a lot of their business here but actually declare their tax returns in London. Of course, we need to ensure that we are spending well and that we are forecasting. It appears to me that quite a lot of the information provided or available to the Executive and to Departments is limited in their understanding of what our tax returns might be in terms of spending forecasts. Any organisation that can assist us in that would be of benefit. There is a commitment under New Decade, New Approach, as there was under previous agreements, to establish a fiscal council. There is no real meat on the bones of that as yet, but we intend to bring forward propositions on it.

I know that the Member has asked about this before, but we also intend to bring forward a proposition for a fiscal commission that can look at the tax-raising and tax-varying powers that might be available to us.

Mr McCann: Does the Minister agree that the Member for Lagan Valley has focused on outdated opinion polls that completely distort the opinions of people throughout this country and that the vast majority of opinion polls now point in the other direction, not only to a border poll but to Irish unity? *[Laughter.]* Does the Minister agree that there is a need to improve data on public finances in the North?

Mr Murphy: Yes. That follows on from my previous response on the creation of a fiscal council. As a former Chair of the Economy Committee, I was aware that, when setting its economic policy, the Department for the Economy did not have access to all the data that you would think it would require, such as data on projections and data to understand the taxes produced in its jurisdiction. There is insufficient data available, and we need to look at ways of strengthening our access so that we can find accurate data. That is a job for the Executive.

On your first point, there is an old adage that goes, "First, they ignore you, then they laugh at you". I think that they are in the second phase, as they are laughing at you. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Allister: Whereas the Minister's creative accounting may be exceeded only by the creative fiction of Mr McCann, will the Minister detail why, in response to Mr Givan, he compared the figure of tax raised with the £21 billion resource spending, instead of comparing it with the figure that is in the ONS document of £28 billion of

public-sector expenditure? Of course, that is the gap that he cannot explain and can never fill, and neither can the country that he aspires to be part of.

Mr Murphy: Given our exchange yesterday, I prepared a further explanation. That is another accountancy exercise that puts a cost of depreciation against our capital assets. What I have referred to is money that is available for people here to spend, as opposed to taxes that were raised here. The gap is £3.3 billion. Those are ONS figures. You cannot accept one part of them and then dispute the other. The ONS was very clear in its figures. The additional money that you referred to is made up of things such as assessing and costing depreciation against our assets.

Lone Pensioner Allowance

2. **Ms Bunting** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the rate of uptake of the lone pensioner allowance. (AQO 179/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Uptake of the lone pensioner allowance scheme has increased annually since its introduction in 2008, with £6.99 million being awarded during the 2018-19 rating year. The scheme is jointly administered by Land and Property Services (LPS) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

During 2018-19, LPS provided support to 29,841 lone pensioners who own and occupy their own home. That is an increase of 48% on the 2009-2010 position. LPS regularly attends outreach events such as the Pensioners Parliament and Young at Heart, at which LPS staff take time to explain the relief to citizens who may be eligible to apply.

Ms Bunting: I thank the Minister for his answer, but 29,000 out of our population, given our number of senior citizens, is not significant. Does the Minister find that acceptable? Does he think that more can be done? What will he do to promote the scheme?

Mr Murphy: We should bear in mind that it is not a means-tested scheme, so it applies to all pensioners. Some may be aware of it but consider that they do not necessarily need to access it.

The scheme was introduced in 2008. LPS has issued leaflets with rates bills and placed 'Help paying your rates' booklets in libraries and GP surgeries. It has also issued posters for display in a range of public places, including all LPS and Housing Executive offices, and provided online help through nirect web pages and the Housing Executive website. It has also engaged in partnership working with the voluntary and community sectors and collaborated with other Departments, such as on the Department for Communities' Make the Call scheme. LPS also communicates through departmental social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter and attends claimant stakeholder events. There has been a range of measures undertaken.

If the Member is aware of any deficiencies and thinks that improvements can be made or that there are areas that LPS is not reaching that might yield more people who are entitled to the benefit, I and, I am sure, LPS will be more than happy to hear from her.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for schooling some Members on the finances of the North. I look forward to discussing on other occasions the finances of a united

Ireland, but, for today, will the Minister introduce rates relief for rural ATMs?

Mr Murphy: There was a scheme until very recently that provided rate relief for rural ATMs. I think that that requires further legislation to continue it. It is certainly something that I will consider, but we are trying to consider wider rates schemes in their entirety because, clearly, there is enormous pressure on certain sectors as a consequence of rates, and we are trying to ensure that we have the fairest possible system. Everything will be in the melting pot in that discussion, including further legislation to extend rate relief to rural ATMs.

Mr Nesbitt: If I heard the Minister correctly, he said that LPS's outreach includes going to the Pensioners Parliament. As I understand it, the Pensioners Parliament no longer exists because of a lack of funds. Would the Minister of Finance like to fund a revival?

Mr Murphy: You cannot blame LPS for funding the Pensioners Parliament. To be quite honest, I am not sure how it was funded, but I would be more than interested. I had some engagement with it in my constituency a number of years back; it was a very worthy thing. If you want to be pinned to your collar with questions about a whole range of social policy areas, the Pensioners Parliament is the place to go, I can tell you. I am disappointed to hear that it has been discontinued. I would be more than supportive of somebody bringing forward a proposition to reinstate it.

Ministerial Code

3. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance to outline any changes to the ministerial code since it was established. (AQO 180/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The recent work to revise the text of the ministerial code has been led by the Department of Finance with political parties as part of the political talks process in the transparency, accountability and governance working group. The latest revisions will detail the accountability of Ministers to the Assembly; strengthen declaration-of-interests requirements; set out that Ministers are responsible for the management, conduct and discipline of their special advisers; and make clear the need for the recording of ministerial meetings and decisions.

Mr Allister: The Minister did not indicate when this ministerial code might come into operation, but I am really more interested in how robust it will be. For example, if a Minister, after a paramilitary killing in his constituency, described the innocent victim as a "criminal" to take the heat off the organisation that carried out the murder, and if he then vacillated between denying having said that and, ultimately, apologising for the hurt caused but never withdrawing the words that the victim was a "criminal", would such a Minister be caught and accountable under the ministerial code that this Minister is bringing forward?

Mr Murphy: The codes are with other Ministers for consideration. I expect to bring them forward fairly soon. One of the recommendations is for commissioners who will make recommendations on the behaviour of Ministers.

In relation to the matter that he outlined, he is incorrect in, first, his description of what took place and, secondly, the motivation of what was said at the time.

Mr McGrath: Although I appreciate and understand that the RHI report is not something that is the direct responsibility of the Minister as it is being carried out by the inquiry, what preparations is the Department making to update the House on his Department's interpretation of the report and future actions as a result of it?

Mr Murphy: The New Decade, New Approach agreement contains a range of proposals. I am not sure whether the Member was on the working group, but, largely, the codes that have been brought forward since restoration are the product of the engagement over the course of last year, particularly last summer, when the five political parties that were to make up the Executive were involved. The agreement that flowed from that contained a range of proposals to make government better, including changes to the ministerial code. It also contains a commitment to further reform to take account of the RHI inquiry, including considering whether any additional changes to the ministerial code are needed following the publication of the report to further rebuild public confidence.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Minister give a clearer indication of the timescale for when he expects to produce the revised Civil Service code?

2.15 pm

Mr Murphy: The revised Civil Service code is, of course, the third part of the work. We have already taken forward the guidance and code in relation to special advisers. The ministerial code is with other Executive colleagues for their consideration, and I expect that to come through an Executive process in the near future. The Civil Service code will follow on from that. It is my intention to get that work done as quickly as we can in the Department, because, although the report into RHI will come in the middle of next month, there was a clear understanding among all of the parties who were involved in those working groups last summer to get these things done in the Assembly and get them out as quickly as we can and subject them, if necessary, to further review and further action as a consequence of what the inquiry might recommend. Certainly, I intend to get that work done as quickly as possible.

Shared Prosperity Fund

4. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the replacement of EU structural funds by the UK shared prosperity fund. (AQO 181/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The shared prosperity fund is being developed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in Whitehall. Despite repeated requests from officials, the pace of development has been very slow, and we still know very little about the design of the fund. I understand that the quantum of the fund and arrangements for its delivery will not be finalised until the spending review, the timing of which has not yet been announced.

I have just written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, setting out our position on the replacement of EU funding. That letter broadly states that we want full replacement of our current spending power and that we want the administration arrangements to be as simple as possible and in line with our devolved responsibilities.

Ms S Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that it appears that the UK Government will attempt to centralise the priority setting and the administration of the shared prosperity fund, what representations has the Minister made to the Westminster Government to frame and shape the fund to suit people here?

Mr Murphy: I touched on that in my answer, but I agree that we have to be very vigilant not only on shaping the amount that is involved — though there is a commitment from the British Government to ensure that the full amount remains available to us — but also on ensuring, as per our devolved role, that we have a responsibility for administering, distributing, setting priorities and setting the programmes for the fund, and we want it to be as simple as possible.

I have written, not only myself but also in collaboration with the Finance Ministers in Scotland and Wales, to the Treasury to make sure that we have a combined view on this. Dates are being kicked around at the moment, but I hope at some stage next week to be over with the other two Finance Ministers to meet the Treasury and raise those issues, because none of the devolved areas are satisfied with what appears to be shaping up, even though very little detail or remit has been put on the idea of a prosperity fund. We want to ensure that the replacement of the EU funds come in full to us and that we have an ability to shape those programmes and deliver them.

Ms Kimmins: What is the Minister's thinking on the objectives of the new EU Peace Plus programme, which has been put in place to build on the incredible work of the Peace and INTERREG programmes?

Mr Murphy: I have engaged with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) on what is shaping up with Peace Plus. Of course, one of the big challenges that Brexit throws up, besides all the political challenges and the challenges to trade east-west and North/South, is the loss of European funding, given how important that has been to us for many, many years. How many projects have been funded by European funding and how many sectors rely on it to keep afloat?

Proposals are being developed, and engagement is ongoing with Europe. I welcome that there is a commitment to Peace Plus from Europe, Dublin, ourselves and the British Government. I want to see that develop fully and make sure that we continue to access the funds that we are entitled to through the programme, and I want to make sure that we use them as best as we can to offset the damage that will be caused by the loss of funds in a range of other areas. Of course, that is part of the answer to the substantive question; we continue to engage with Treasury in relation to the replacement of those funds.

Victims' Payment Scheme

5. **Mr Chambers** asked the Minister of Finance what engagement his Department has had with Her Majesty's Treasury regarding the Troubles-related victims' payment scheme. (AQO 182/17-22)

Mr Murphy: On 31 January 2020, the Secretary of State brought forward regulations to establish a scheme of payments for individuals injured in the Troubles, with a go live date of the end of May 2020. Decisions will be made by the judicially-led victims' payment board. Payments can

be up to £10,000 per annum for life and can be inherited by a nominee. The Executive Office is currently refining costs for the first year, which could be up to £60 million, as well as assessing the costs of subsequent ongoing annual payments. The subject of victims' payments was included in the New Decade, New Approach negotiations with the British Government via the Secretary of State. Under the statement of funding policy, those are costs that should be borne by the British Government, and I will continue to press for them to be met by the Treasury. My recent meeting with Rishi Sunak was constructive, and I hope to engage further with the Treasury in due course.

Mr Chambers: Thank you for that, Minister. Can you give a commitment that there will be no undue delay in commencing payments to the victims?

Mr Murphy: The responsibility for processing this falls to the Executive Office, so it is not my responsibility. I am trying to deal with the finances of it. Looking at it, I have to say that it is very challenging to see that a judicial-led process will be in place and delivering funding by the end of May, but that is the date that has been set, and I do not doubt that the Executive Office will try to meet that demand.

Of primary interest to me is the fact that this was led by the British Government. They established the legislation and led the policy, and, under the statement of funding policy, they should meet the costs, even if it is a matter of transferring the finances to the Executive Office to deliver the payments. The costs should be met by the British Government because they were the lead on it. That has been my primary focus, but I sincerely hope that there is no delay. Victims have been waiting for a very long time on this, but the date of the end of May, I think, is a very challenging date to meet in anybody's book.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Finance Minister's commitment that it is, in fact, the responsibility of the British Government. Can he tell the House whether he has made representation to the British Government on behalf of those who were injured by terrorist organisations where the likes of Libya funded those terrorist organisations? Does he support the British Government's call for those people to be gone after to put some money into the pot for victims?

Mr Murphy: I have not been involved in that type of discussion at all. I know that similar arguments have been made in relation to the old South African regime and the support that it provided to people, which caused enormous damage to victims here as well. It is not something that I have been involved in; it is more a political matter. If the British Government want to pursue other countries for a contribution, that is very much a matter for them. Our interest is that, as per the statement of funding policy, the British Government led on this. They devised the legislation and brought it through, and they should meet the costs.

Ms Dillon: I raised this in this morning's debate, and you will have heard that the British Government do need to bear the responsibility for the cost of this. It is their legislation. It is legislation that ignored much of the advice given to them by the Victims' Commissioner and all of the other victims' groups and responses and consultations. Can you confirm whether you think that the British Government will be forthcoming with this money and whether you have had any discussions with them on additional moneys in relation to the other legacy

mechanisms, given that there is an acknowledgement that £150 million will not touch it?

Mr Murphy: We will continue to raise these matters with the British Government, and I am meeting the Treasury on Thursday in relation to EU funding and then the following week along with the Scottish and Welsh Ministers. We have only estimates for this scheme at the moment, and those are in relation to physical injury that was caused. We have no estimates in relation to the mental injury that was caused during the Troubles. If this scheme is not properly funded by Westminster, that will have a long-term impact on our local Budget, as it would normally take the form of an annual payment and it can be inherited in certain circumstances. Therefore, it has not just a significant but a long-term impact.

On the other legacy mechanisms, there was, of course, an agreement to put in an additional £100 million, I think, as part of New Decade, New Approach. We have yet to see that materialise, and even that, according to the estimates of what the legacy mechanisms cost, still falls short. Therefore, there are ongoing discussions to be had with the Government on that.

Dormant Account Fund

6. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Finance what protections are in place for people with UK bank and building society accounts that meet the criteria for the dormant account fund. (AQO 183/17-22)

Mr Murphy: A dormant account is one where there has been no customer-initiated activity for at least 15 years. Under the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008, banks and building societies transfer the remaining unclaimed assets to a central reclaim fund. Under the Act, customers still retain the right to reclaim their money and can do that by contacting the reclaim fund directly.

A comprehensive reuniting exercise of dormant account holders and their assets was launched by banks and building societies some 10 years ago. That has helped to minimise subsequent reclaims.

Mrs Barton: Since the publicity on the dormant accounts, how many customer account holders have come out of the woodwork to lay claim to them?

Mr Murphy: I apologise; I do not have that. Dormant accounts are done centrally in Britain for all the regions. As I said, there had been quite a promotion to ensure that people could claim their entitlement if they somehow missed and the finances in their dormant account were seized against their wishes. I have been told that it has been minimised. I do not have the numbers for that. I will endeavour to get them and send them to the Member. We will eventually get our share of the dormant accounts, and then we will attempt to distribute that to very worthy causes.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Minister give us some assurance that the dormant accounts will be used for the sustainability of social enterprises?

Mr Murphy: The Department of Finance directed the National Lottery Community Fund to establish a dormant account scheme here in September 2019 under three key themes: capacity building; resilience; and sustainability. As required by the dormant accounts Act, the lottery has consulted stakeholders as to how a fund could be used

here. The outcome of the consultation will inform the basis of a strategic plan that will be laid in the Assembly, preferably by the end of this financial year. That will outline how those broad themes that were agreed will be met in the practice of distributing that money here.

Reval2020: Public Houses and Hotels

7. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the receipts and expenditure formula used in Reval2020 to calculate the net annual value of public houses and hotels and the resulting rateable values. (AQO 184/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The receipts and expenditure method of valuation of non-domestic rating used by Land and Property Services is the established approach agreed between professional valuation bodies and government valuation bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and also here. All business rates are based on rental value. However, if evidence of a rent is not available, different approaches are needed to determine the rental value. Anyone wanting to rent a pub or hotel will want to know how it is trading. That is why valuers call for accounts and turnover.

Increased values for some pubs and hotels are a result of improved turnovers between 2013 and 2018. If ratepayers believe that LPS has got any values wrong, there is a straightforward process to produce the evidence. Unfortunately, the response rate for pubs and hotels to provide information for revaluation has been poor. Following Reval2020, 40% of pubs will see no change or a decrease in their valuation.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his response, especially because he spoke about it ad nauseam at his previous Question Time. So many of our local pubs are community hubs in our towns and villages, and I have been lobbied about the possibility that some of them may have to close. Will the Minister ensure that communication is kept open, with the possibility of appeals or whatever that might be between his Department and the pubs that act as community hubs?

Mr Murphy: I get that. I live in a village that once had seven pubs and very little else. That was because our neighbouring village of Bessbrook did not have any for religious reasons, which was much to the benefit of Camlough. [Laughter.] I get that businesses are struggling and that we need to make sure that the rating system is fair. I met, as part of a broader delegation, Hospitality Ulster and the Hotels Federation, and it was made very clear to them that people can challenge and appeal a valuation, but we are trying to encourage an uptake in this attempt to provide accounts and turnover as a way of proving whether people were doing better business or not. In the history of our businesses, people do not necessarily like sharing that information with government, but it is a way of challenging if people are making an assessment based on a false assumption. In this exercise, and going into the future, I want to get a complete assessment of all rates and get the fairest possible system so that people can see how assessments are arrived at, and they can also see what the money is being spent on from the rates gathered.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will drink to that.

Ms Armstrong: As highlighted by Ms Bradley and acknowledged by the Minister, a number of rural pubs are community hubs, so is there any leeway? Has rural proofing been considered in Reval2020 because some of my local pubs, which are necessary for tourism in the area, are facing hardship, which may lead to potential closure?

2.30 pm

Mr Murphy: The revaluation is based on rentable value, and that takes account of pubs in the middle of the city centre. They, of course, have a much higher rentable value than those in rural communities. It takes account of turnover as well. If the turnover is provided, perhaps it will show that a rural pub has quieter times than a busy urban pub. Those things are taken into account. I am not sure that a formal rural-proofing exercise was done, given that it is a fairly straightforward valuation exercise that takes account of the size of a property and its rental value. People have been lobbied extensively. We have all been lobbied on the issue. My job is to try to find the fairest possible system. Where people feel that the valuation is incorrect, that they get the wrong bill or that the bill is way and above what they should pay, there are opportunities to challenge and appeal that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I apologise. I know that a Member was looking to get in on that subject. Unfortunately, the time has gone, and we must move on to topical questions.

PSNI: Funding

T1. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Finance, given that he has made much of the £600 million shortfall in public finances, whether he will assure the House that, following the Budget settlement, he agrees that key to addressing the challenges that we face in Northern Ireland is adequate resourcing for the Police Service of Northern Ireland so that it can go after with all vigour and all rigour those who are criminals, those who have inflicted murder on our communities and those who have been responsible for some of the most heinous crimes, including the murder of Paul Quinn. (AQT 141/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Any resource bids for the broad justice area, including the Police Service and whatever it considers it requires to carry out its duties, are made through the Department of Justice. I had a discussion with the Minister of Justice, as I did with all Ministers, in the run-up to trying to set a Budget for the Executive in the coming weeks. Clearly, I am aware of what their pressures are. I am also aware that New Decade, New Approach has committed to, I think, an additional 600 police officers. The challenge will be finding and recruiting those officers — getting them in, training them and getting them out on the streets where they are very much needed.

In line with all Departments — the Department of Justice is no different — I will try to meet, as best I can, within the limited resources available, the bids that all Departments declare as very high priorities or inescapable pressures.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for that, but will he give a specific assurance that the Barnett consequentials, particularly those that came as a result of the announcement by the Prime Minister of additional police officers in the United Kingdom, will not be taken and used by the Department of Finance in any way other

than what they were designated for specifically? He has responsibility for that, not the Department of Justice.

Mr Murphy: Having previously occupied the position of Minister of Finance, the Member will know that Barnett consequentials are not ring-fenced in that fashion. If the Executive decide to keep those Barnett consequentials for the provision of additional policing, that is an Executive decision, and I am quite happy to abide by that. It is clearly a matter for the Executive to decide how to spend them.

Brexit: Funding Losses

T2. **Dr Archibald** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the funding that will be lost as a result of Brexit. (AQT 142/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The funding at risk includes CAP, which totalled €2.3 billion over the last seven years; the European social fund, which was €210 million over the same period; the investment for growth and jobs programme, which was €313 million; and access to loans from the European Investment Bank.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Minister for his response. I am sure that I do not need to tell him about the importance of the various EU funding streams right across society: the community and voluntary sector; agriculture and rural development; and, importantly, research and innovation funding to boost economic development. I am sure that, like me, he is concerned about the loss of access to that funding. What will he do to try to continue to access those funds, and what replacement funding will he seek?

Mr Murphy: As I said in answer to a previous question, I have written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Alongside that, I had a discussion with the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers. We will be meeting jointly with the Treasury, I think, hopefully, at the tail end of next week. Our position is that we want all EU funding to be fully replaced. The commitment that has been given by the British Government is that we will not lose out on that. Unfortunately, we know very little as yet about the shared prosperity fund that has been developed by the British Government to replace EU funding. The quantum of that funding is not expected to be finalised until the spending review, the timing of which has not yet been announced. Our approach is that we want the full quantum and the ability to administer and set the programmes in conjunction with the EU, which was previously the case with EU funding.

Victims' Pension Costs

T3. **Ms Sheerin** asked the Minister of Finance how much he expects the victims' payment to cost. (AQT 143/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The cost estimates are high-level at present, but the Executive Office advises that the costs in 2021 amount to between £25 million and £60 million. The assumed cost total of £109 million is over the three years from 2021 to 2022-23. Again, those are estimates. I think the initial estimate is based on a number of people who were physically injured as a consequence of the conflict, not people who perhaps received other damage as a consequence of the conflict, so it is very much a guesstimate at this moment in time.

Ms Sheerin: What is the Minister's view on where this funding should come from?

Mr Murphy: I base my view on this on the statement of funding policy, which applies to our finances and the finances in Scotland and Wales, which are devolved areas. That makes it clear that the body whose decision leads to the additional cost will meet that cost. The decision to provide this was made by the British Government, and, under that policy, the rules state very clearly that they meet that cost. It was legislated that the decision maker on the policy was the British Government, and, therefore, in my view, it is the British Government's responsibility to fund the victims' payment scheme.

Social Enterprise

T4. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Finance to outline his plans to support social enterprise. (AQT 144/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I had the great pleasure of engaging with the social enterprise sector last night at City Hall in the social enterprise cafe that is there. We discussed plans in a number of round-table discussions with the sector last night. Plans include social value legislation so that social enterprises can compete for government contracts on a level playing field using the dormant accounts fund to support social enterprise and create sustainability. We have been doing some work with the Department for Communities on community asset transfer, and we will continue to see where we can work not just in the Department of Finance but cross-departmentally to assist the social enterprise sector, which performs such a valuable role.

Mr Lynch: How does the Minister intend to improve the community asset transfer policy, which he mentioned in his answer?

Mr Murphy: As I said, we have met the Communities Minister and both permanent secretaries on that and a range of other issues, but, certainly, community asset transfer was on that agenda. We are working on a range of improvements to make it easier to identify assets and then to transfer them. We are also considering how social enterprise can be supported to manage assets over the long term.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Topical question 5 in the name of Mr David Hilditch has been withdrawn, so I call Ms Gemma Dolan.

Translation Hub: Update

T6. **Ms Dolan** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the translation hub. (AQT 146/17-22)

Mr Murphy: As the Member will know, the translation hub, along with the Irish language legislation and other legislation relating to cultural issues, was part of the discussions that led up to the New Decade, New Approach agreement. A responsibility has been provided to the Department of Finance to deliver the translation hub within the three-month period identified in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, and that is the work that we will be undertaking. I met Conradh na Gaeilge recently to discuss best practice for the operation of translation hubs. We will be inputting that information and discussion into the Department's work to get this done within the time frame outlined.

Ms Dolan: Can the Minister also update us on the commitment in the New Decade, New Approach deal that births, marriages and deaths can be registered in Irish?

Mr Murphy: That is another area of work that we have been tasked with undertaking. I have asked my officials to begin work on this, and I hope to be in a position very shortly to update the Assembly on progress on it.

Skills Deficit: Senior Civil Servants

T7. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Finance, given that he will be aware of a number of critical reports on the capital build project skills deficit among senior civil servants, whether he has had any discussions about this and what action he intends to take to address the issue. (AQT 147/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I am aware of the Audit Office report on capital projects, which is critical to delivery. We always have lessons to learn when an Audit Office report comes out. As a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, I am aware of the work that goes into its reports. The Procurement Board, which I chair, will meet on 1 April, and I intend to have the Audit Office report discussed at the meeting, after which I will direct the Procurement Board to commence a review of the role of procurement in delivering major capital projects, because that is the responsibility of my Department. Other Departments are involved in a range of issues, but procurement has a key role to play. I want to ensure that the Department of Finance plays its role.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister elaborate on whether the Strategic Investment Board has a role to play in the delivery of capital projects, given the underspend that there has been to date?

Mr Murphy: The Strategic Investment Board will provide advice to all Departments. It has key experience of doing that. Where we find a skills deficit such as that which you outlined, and if the Audit Office report clearly identifies a skills deficit as one of the failings, we should address it. Skills can be supplemented in part through those that exist on the Strategic Investment Board, but, for others, we may need to look outside. We will try to ensure that we can recruit people with those skills. My Department has already been in discussion with the Strategic Investment Board, and I am sure that other Departments that are criticised over capital projects will be in touch with it as well, because it is a source of advice for everyone.

NDNA: Financial Commitments

T8. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Finance, given that openness and transparency are key to the remit of the Department of Finance and that the Executive parties have consistently stated that the British Government have reneged on the spending arrangements promised to them to get them involved in the New Decade, New Approach agreement, to detail exactly what the financial commitments were, particularly as the lack of transparency is somewhat concerning. (AQT 148/17-22)

Mr Murphy: There is no lack of transparency around what the commitments were. Rather, the lack of transparency is around the British Government meeting the cost of those commitments. In the Second Stage debate earlier, Members talked about wish lists. Bear in mind that all five parties on the Executive came to the process together, through a structured piece of work done with senior civil servants in the Department of Finance and senior officials in the NIO. Together we came up with a list that, we were

told, was certainly achievable. The British Government were reluctant to provide figures, and they then abruptly called an end to the negotiation. That has caused uncertainty. Since I have come into post, I have done an exercise costing the proposals that they committed to. It is their document. I intend to engage with the Treasury this week again about securing the necessary finance to meet the commitments made.

Mr Carroll: It is concerning that there are commitments in New Decade, New Approach that have not been adequately budgeted for. There is talk of funding gaps of several hundreds of millions of pounds. Will the Minister commit to doing all that he can to ensure that the British Government live up to their commitments?

Mr Murphy: That is what I have been doing, and that is why the exercise was undertaken in the first instance. We were told by the NIO that the negotiation was over. We were told, "That is your money, and that is it." We did not accept that. I undertook an exercise to cost the commitments made across the Departments. Some of them were for cross-departmental work, so it took some time to get the costs together. I went over and engaged with Treasury on that basis. It was a fairly positive engagement. I intend to go back this week to continue that discussion and to have discussions in Whitehall generally. I have certainly not given up on pursuing that finance, and I am glad that I have the support of all my Executive colleagues in doing so. I hope that we will have something to show for it.

We delivered politically through the commitments that the five parties made under New Decade, New Approach. We could not now simply approach that agreement politically and say, "We signed up to it, but we did not mean any of it", so the British Government cannot disengage financially from the commitments that they made.

Contaminated Blood Scandal

T9. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Finance whether the money he allocated for the people who have been affected by the contaminated blood scandal is being spent in the way that was intended. (AQT 149/17-22)

Mr Murphy: As the Member knows, we allocated £1 million as part of the monitoring round for people affected by the contaminated blood scandal. It has been an ongoing, tragic issue for many of the families involved. It was essential, at the first available opportunity, that we demonstrated support for them. The Department of Health has received the money and allocated £600,000 of the £1 million. The Health Minister has assured me that he intends to use the full £1 million.

2.45 pm

Mr Sheehan: Is the Minister aware of how many people in the North have been affected by this scandal?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Minister, a quick response, please.

Mr Murphy: There are figures, and, in consultation with my colleague the Health Minister, I will try to get them to you.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Finance. We move now to questions to

the Minister of Health. Topical questions 8, 9 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Health

Cancer Strategy: Update

1. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Health for an update on a new cancer strategy and implementation plan. (AQO 208/17-22)

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your indulgence, I may ask for an extra minute on this one.

The New Decade, New Approach agreement gave a commitment that the Executive would produce a new cancer strategy by the end of December 2020, and I intend to see that commitment delivered. However, my Department began developing the new strategy in June last year, using a co-production approach from the outset to maximise the patient's voice. The strategy will focus on fewer people getting preventable cancers, more people surviving for longer after diagnosis and improving the experience of care for cancer patients.

Development of the strategy is overseen by a steering group, membership of which was drawn from a wide range of sectoral stakeholders from across Northern Ireland, including the voluntary sector, those with lived experience, clinicians and subject experts. The steering group is co-chaired by the Chief Nursing Officer and a lived-experience representative. The steering group is supported by seven themed subgroups, each led by a sectoral expert and co-chaired by a lived-experience representative.

The development of the cancer strategy is being taken forward in three phases. Phase 1 looked at the current services, with each subgroup providing an overview of how and where services are currently delivered. Subgroups also developed an aspirational statement of what an optimised service would look like. Phase 2 involved those subgroups using the outputs of phase 1 to identify a gap analysis that provides an indication of what is required to achieve a high-performing cancer service. Phase 3 commenced this month and will see subgroups begin the development of options and recommendations for actions. Taken together, those three phases will form the basis for the new draft 10-year cancer strategy, and a fully costed implementation plan will be developed following the approval of the recommendations.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Minister for his response. When the Department announced that it was going to produce a new cancer strategy, it referred to looking at best practices in neighbouring jurisdictions and focused particularly on NHS England, which established an independent cancer task force. While I appreciate that the work of the review body is ongoing — the Minister has given us a breakdown of that — is the Department still minded to go in the direction of travel of a cancer task force?

Mr Swann: Through our work on the strategy and the three phases, one of the main directions we have taken is co-production, to make sure that the lived-experience individuals have an input. In regard to a task force, we will look at that as we develop the cancer strategy and see if

there is a need for that at this point in time to make sure that we have a consistent approach across the whole of the UK, and also with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Buckley: In relation to implementation plans, the Minister and the House will be aware of the worldwide concerns there are about coronavirus. Breaking news just out is that pupils of Banbridge Academy have been sent home amid fears following a school trip to Italy. Will the Minister give an urgent update to the House?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I know it is straying slightly from the original question, but I am prepared to update.

We are in a fast-moving situation, and the case definition regarding areas at risk has recently changed with regard to Italy. Updated guidance will be issued to healthcare professionals later today, but, in the meantime, if anyone has concerns, they should check the Public Health Agency's website, which will direct them to the most updated guidance.

Schools were issued guidance on 17 February, and that will now be updated to reflect what is happening today. It is, of course, up to the principal of any school to decide whether they believe that they should close their school. Based on the latest information, I believe that it is unlikely, at this stage, that any school will have to close if it follows the latest guidance. Our officials are working with the Public Health Agency and the Education Authority to make sure that all schools in Northern Ireland that have had pupils on skiing trips in parts of Italy, whether in affected areas or not, are given the most up-to-date guidance.

Mr Muir: Minister, you may have seen the Cancer Research UK report today concerning smoking prevalence projections for all nations of the UK. In that, regrettably, it states that it does not feel that Northern Ireland will achieve smoke-free status until the late 2040s. Will the Minister please outline what he plans to do to get that back on track to achieve the target of 2035?

Mr Swann: In regard to how we prevent smoking and de-escalate the numbers taking up smoking, as a direction of travel, work has to be done in the education of our young people. How we get back on track is one of the things that the cancer strategy and the groups involved will need to look at, as well as looking at the causes. We need to look at how we address and challenge preventable cancers to make sure that we do not get to that stage, and smoking cessation is one of those actions.

Mrs Barton: Minister, I look forward to further developments on your cancer strategy. Can you confirm whether patients in Northern Ireland now have the same access to cancer drugs as those across the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for her supplementary. On 12 September 2018, my Department announced that the promising new medicines that have been available to patients in the rest of the UK will now be available to patients in Northern Ireland. What that means in practice is that all those new medicines that have entered the reformed cancer drugs fund since 2016 will be available for patients in Northern Ireland. This new approach will ensure that drugs approved by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) for use through the cancer drugs fund in England will now be considered in line with existing

arrangements for Northern Ireland endorsement of NICE recommendations. Accordingly, patients here will have the same access to cancer drugs as their counterparts in other UK regions.

Ms S Bradley: Minister, for clarification, can you confirm that, given the process that you described at the end of your answer, you anticipate there being a cancer strategy? If so, what is the timeline for that being rolled out and delivered?

Mr Swann: I can confirm that, as I think I already did in the first part of my answer. 'New Decade, New Approach' states that the Executive should deliver a cancer strategy by December 2020, and that is what we are, and I am, committed to doing. We have taken forward that work through co-production, and that is what the lived-experience individuals expect from us as elected representatives. The recommendations that come from that will set our timeline from then on. I will have to ensure that there is relevant funding there at that point in time.

Mental Health Street Triage Project

2. **Ms Flynn** asked the Minister of Health to outline his plans regarding the further roll-out of the mental health street triage project. (AQO 209/17-22)

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for her question. Current indications that we have are that the multi-agency triage team's programme is working very effectively in Belfast and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust areas. An evaluation report is expected in March that will inform the future development of the service. Wider roll-out will be dependent on additional funding being made available and commitment from delivery partners. Options for a wider roll-out include moving from the existing two-day operation to a seven-day-a-week operation and an extension to the other three health and social care trust areas.

Ms Flynn: I thank Minister Swann for his response. Given the positive cross-agency working thus far between the PSNI and health and social care staff, not just in the example of the street triage but the pilot schemes in the custody suites, will the Minister elaborate on any discussions that his Department has had with the PSNI to ensure the continued roll-out of those important projects?

Mr Swann: The work that we do in the custody suites is equally valuable, because the people who go into them do not always need to see a custody officer. Sometimes, a health professional who can interact with a person at that point of detention can prevent a lot of things going an awful lot worse. I have committed to working with my ministerial colleague in Justice to make sure that that programme is enhanced. Again, that will depend on where funding falls. At this minute in time, the PSNI would like us to pick up the entire cost of that facility and provision. It is working and is something that we need to develop across the Executive.

Mr Dunne: Can the Minister advise us on the progress of the new Executive group on mental health and assure the House of the Department's commitment to addressing the real problem that we have in Northern Ireland in relation to mental health, especially among young people?

Mr Swann: The Member does not have to question me or my Department about our commitment to addressing mental health issues in Northern Ireland, especially among young people. The Executive working group that we have

established is due to meet in the next couple of weeks. One thing that sends out a strong signal from the House is the willingness of all my ministerial colleagues to engage in addressing mental health issues in Northern Ireland. As one of my predecessors said, every Minister is a Health Minister; in fact, at this minute in time, every Minister is a mental health Minister as well. There is so much that can be done on mental health across each Department, should be it early interventions in education, the provision of free green spaces by the Department of Agriculture or the structures that can be provided by the Department for Infrastructure that could prevent an individual going in a certain direction. The Member does not have to question that commitment, because I am assured that I have cross-Executive support for it and I will not be found wanting.

Mr Carroll: Given that mental health is, obviously, a priority for the Minister, will he do all that he can to ensure that mental health groups that struggle to stay open, such as Compass Counselling on the Shankill, will be supported to stay open?

Mr Swann: I acknowledge the support that the Member has given to Compass Counselling, and I am aware that there is a rally on Saturday to support that group. Health and Social Care organisations work closely with many organisations to provide services in the community, and all such services are funded in line with public procurement policy. I hope that he can appreciate that it is not possible to provide funding to organisations that are outside that framework.

I am aware that the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is due to hold a tendering exercise to produce counselling services in the coming financial year. Compass Counselling, like other organisations, will be invited to submit a tender to provide those services. I suggest that the directors of Compass Counselling should engage with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, and I am sure that the Member will be able to support them in any bid that they make. I am aware of the work that they do, and I am aware of the support that the Member has given them.

Ms Dillon: Given the conversations that we have had today about the Budget, will the Minister confirm that, where pilot schemes are being run with ministerial colleagues, he will look at how those schemes will be funded, at the point of implementation, in future? Those pilot schemes are excellent, but are we wasting money running them when we have no plans for funding them, going forward?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for making a very valid point. Since taking up office, I have heard from areas across the health and social care system that pilot schemes start to do very good work but continued funding is not always there and not always guaranteed. Along with the Finance Minister, working with a one-year Budget is the challenge that we have as an Executive. Often, when we do that, we create pilot schemes to test out good project. However, were we to get to a stage where we had three- or four-year concurrent budgeting, we could give those organisations and those parts of the health service that buy in and invest a lot of time, energy, effort and manpower in what we classify as "pilots" so that they can do them for a short space of time a lot more certainty about what they do. It would also allow us as a Department and our health service time to transform and use those pilots as part of our transformation project so that we can

bring about the changes that we want to see in our health and social care service.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Philip McGuigan is not in his place, but, if we all crack on — it was a grouped question at question 12 — we might get to Mr Durkan.

3.00 pm

Muckamore Abbey Hospital: Patients

4. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Health whether the departmental action plan for the resettlement of patients from Muckamore Abbey Hospital has been completed. (AQO 211/17-22)

Mr Swann: Work to complete the resettlement of patients remaining in Muckamore Abbey Hospital is ongoing. As of 17 February 2020, there were 53 patients in the hospital, which includes two patients transitioning to new places of residence. Twelve of the remaining patients are there from the priority target list for resettlement. The priority list was defined by the Bamford review as patients who had been resident in hospital for at least a year as of 1 April 2007. That is a reduction of 223 from an original cohort of 235 patients identified by Bamford at that point in the review.

Although much progress has been made on completing the resettlement programme, I have made clear my commitment to continuing to reduce lengthy hospital admissions by supporting people to live sustainably in local communities, in line with the vision set by Bamford's 'Equal Lives' report and, more recently, the Bengoa review. To deliver on that, a regional learning disability operational delivery group, chaired by the Health and Social Care Board and reporting to the Muckamore departmental assurance group, has been established to coordinate a regional approach to the resettlement of the inpatient population at Muckamore. While resettlement is an important issue, the welfare of the patient is paramount, and that will mean that one size may not always fit all.

Mr Sheehan: The Minister will be aware that, at the start of last year, the Department announced a plan to have all patients in Muckamore resettled by the end of last year. I have spoken to many people in the learning disability sector who tell me that that was a totally unrealistic proposition. The Department was told that and ignored it. I hope that the Minister has the requisite funding to ensure that as many patients as possible can be resettled in the community. For many patients who have been institutionalised for a long time, that will require bespoke support services in the community and, in many instances, bespoke accommodation. Has funding been secured for a plan like that?

Mr Swann: Going back to the Member's point about the timeline, I think it was unacceptable and probably unachievable. As we have seen and as I said, the welfare of the patient is paramount, so, when we look at resettlement opportunities, we have to make sure that they are fit for purpose and that not only the patient but the family is supported.

With regard to funding, we are looking at how we go forward in a holistic approach to resettlement across the entirety of Northern Ireland. We have to give the patients in Muckamore the fullest support that we can, in the House and as a Department, to make sure that any

who avail themselves of resettlement and are eligible for resettlement are fully supported and go to places that are fit for their purpose.

Mr Gildernew: I have a follow-up question to Pat Sheehan's. Will the Minister acknowledge that working with families closely and in good time can prevent inappropriate admissions, from which many of the long-stay residents of Muckamore have come? Will he also commit to look at the trust's budgeting in terms of learning disability underspend, where moneys that have been allocated to help parents and carers to support people at home have been underspent to the tune of millions of pounds, and ensure that that will not happen in future?

Mr Swann: The Chair makes a valid point. It is about how we support the families and patients who are there to our full potential, to make sure that any facility or place that they go to for resettlement is fit for purpose and provides that engagement with the family. With regard to the resettlement progress and process, I think that the trust is already working on how it engages with families and parents. I have now met families twice with regard to Muckamore. The resettlement issue has been raised, and we have been looking into it very seriously.

I will look at the underspend. I was not aware of that exact budget line until the Chair raised it, but I will look at that and get back to the Member.

Mrs Cameron: None of us wants anybody to have a Muckamore Abbey Hospital postcode; that is unacceptable. However, we have to be conscious, especially given the number of individuals who are left in Muckamore and have not been resettled, that that will be because their cases are very complex. I ask the Minister to assure the House that much care is taken in assessing individuals' suitability to be resettled in the community and that such assessment is absolutely correct before resettlement is attempted. It is highly distressing when it does not work out and individuals end up returning to Muckamore Abbey.

Mr Swann: The Deputy Chair's point is well made. That is why that work on resettlement is vital. It is about how we engage more with the families. If a family says to professionals sitting around a table that their loved one is not ready to be resettled, that input has to be listened to and actioned. I have been given some assurance on that, given the unsuccessful level of resettlement from Muckamore in the past. It is a live issue, and we are aware of it. The trust team and the leadership team who are now in place on Muckamore are working to make sure that any resettlement, as I said, is fit for purpose. One size will not fit all. At the heart of this, the welfare of the patient is paramount.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister provide an update on the establishment of a public inquiry into Muckamore Abbey Hospital?

Mr Swann: I have made it clear that patients and families have a right to answers on what went so appallingly wrong at Muckamore. Clearly, I have a decision to make in establishing the best process to provide those answers. My decision has to be an informed one, so I am carefully considering detailed advice from my officials on what we know about what happened at Muckamore and on the options, going forward. Of course, any decision that I take will be informed by the views of the people who use the services at Muckamore and their families. I have already

visited the hospital to meet patients, families, carers and staff so that I could hear from them as early as possible. I recently met Action for Muckamore. It is important to note that any process that is put in place to provide the answers that we need will have to take cognisance of the major PSNI investigation that is ongoing.

Health Trusts: Car Parking

5. **Mr Harvey** asked the Minister of Health how he plans to provide free car parking for health trust workers. (AQO 212/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department's policy aims to ensure the effective provision of car parking across the health estate for patients, visitors and staff. Decisions on how the policy is applied is for each health and social care trust to determine. In that regard, charging is an important mechanism on sites where space is limited to control demand and ensure that there are sufficient spaces for patients and visitors. Charging also helps to cover the cost of the provision and maintenance of car parks, including the associated security costs. I recognise that charging for car parking on our hospital and other healthcare sites is a difficult and emotive issue. However, if charging were to stop, the associated costs would need to be met from elsewhere in the health budget, and that would reduce the amount available to me to fund patient care.

Mr Harvey: In Scotland and Wales, they do not pay for hospital parking; in England, concessions are offered to staff and patients. Can we be assured that car-parking facilities across the health trusts will be accessible for staff and patients and that capacity will be considered, particularly in upgrades or new facilities? Patients and visitors who travel to hospitals from many parts of Northern Ireland often endure long delays and queues while waiting for a parking space. Parking at hospitals should be a simple exercise, not a stressful one, with our goal being to make life easier for everyone.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his point. It is well made, and I do not think it is anything that has not been raised with any MLA. As I said, the policy set by the Department is then applied by each health and social care trust as it sees fit, so the criteria for car parking vary from site to site and can be more stringently applied in some restricted areas where there is difficulty in parking or a lack of parking spaces. The process is intended to help trusts balance the interests of patients, the public and staff and apply the agreed criteria as fairly and as equally as possible.

The Member may have an interest in the Ulster Hospital. I know that plans are in place to construct a new 149-space car park adjacent to the new acute services block at the Ulster Hospital, and that facility will provide accessible car parking for patients and visitors attending the ED and wards. The new car park will be operational prior to the opening of the acute services block.

Mr G Kelly: I listened to the Minister's answer, and, while he agrees that there are variations in different areas and in different hospitals, will he, as a Minister, do anything or, at least, enquire into how you bring the variations down so that, if we cannot do away with the charge, there is a fair price for everyone who uses the car parks?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his point. There are trusts and areas that provide free car parking, so I suppose

that his direction of travel, if I were to go that way, would see car parking charges across all health facilities. If that is what he is suggesting, I will raise it with trusts, but, at this minute in time, it is up to them how they interpret the Department's policy on car parking charges.

Mr O'Toole: We drive far too much in Northern Ireland. There will clearly be patients who will need to use transportation to get to hospitals and nurses and medical staff who work irregular shifts and are often exhausted and finish at odd times. Notwithstanding those groups, what is the Department doing to incentivise either administrative staff in hospitals or families who are visiting to, where possible, not use their cars to get to hospitals but to use public transport or their feet?

Mr Swann: In regard to encouraging patients and visitors to use public transport, I am happy to have the conversation with the Member's party colleague in Infrastructure to see how we can increase and support public transport, should it be buses or trains, to the facilities in the health and social care trusts that are accessible. He mentioned walking to hospital. Often, many people who need to go to hospital are not fit to walk there, so that is why they need to use cars, but, again, for those who are visiting, I would encourage a healthy lifestyle at any point. Encouraging the use of public transport is something that I will definitely take up with my ministerial colleague.

Mr Chambers: I suspect that, ideally, the Minister would prefer all our health facilities to have sufficient space to allow visitors and staff to park for free, but, unfortunately, for some, the space is so limited that it is just not an option. Can the Minister give us a flavour of how much income is raised by car parking charges?

Mr Swann: Our 2018-19 figures, which are the last full ones available, show that car parks raised £7.5 million. The cost of running those car parks was £8.8 million. Those figures show that the cost of car parking is not being fully recovered across all trusts, and, as a result, my Department has been engaged with trusts over the last year to ensure that the money required to run car parks is recovered from their use so that additional funding can be made available to fund patient services.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We have literally 30 seconds left, so it will need to be a 15-second question and a 15-second answer.

Ms Armstrong: If the Minister is committed to the health and well-being of people, will he ensure that all new trust buildings and other Department of Health buildings are accessible by buses, with roads wide enough for bus lanes? Otherwise, public transport will be unable to come to hospitals.

3.15 pm

Mr Swann: I will take into consideration the need for them to be accessible by public transport when considering any new hospital designs. How is that for a commitment? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Excellent. Well done.

We now move on to topical questions to the Minister of Health.

Rural GP Practices: Capital Spending

T1. **Ms Dolan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the priorities in his capital spending plans for rural GP practices. (AQT 151/17-22)

Mr Swann: We have a number of areas that we can see are clearly struggling, not just to attract rural GPs but to maintain them in facilities that are fit for purpose for the service that they deliver. We have done a detailed piece of work on that. If the Member is happy for me to do so, I can write to her with a more detailed breakdown of the areas that we will invest in and where we can do that.

Ms Dolan: Will the Minister communicate with the Health and Social Care Board and the Western Trust to request an update on the plans for the health centres in Carrickmore and Lisnaskea?

Mr Swann: Certainly. I know that the business case for Lisnaskea is well developed. We should be ready to proceed very soon, once we get agreement on the site. I cannot recall the information on the other one off the top of my head, but, again, I commit to writing to the Member with the details of her request.

Nurses

T2. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Health, in the light of the chronic shortage in the number of nurses and the lengthy process needed to train new nurses, whether he will consider a financial incentive to get nurses whose registration has lapsed back into the system and into our hospital wards in a fraction of the time that it takes to train new staff. (AQT 152/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am not sure whether the Member is aware, but we commissioned a very detailed report on nursing and midwifery, which was done by Sir Richard Barnett. He has come forward with a number of recommendations on how we can support our nurses and midwives in the profession; on how we can make sure that the skills shortage is maintained at current levels; and on how we can get to a place where we can fill the 2,700 nursing vacancies. I am not sure whether one of those recommendations is a financial incentive, but, if not, I will look at that. I cannot give the Member a guarantee here and now, but it is definitely a valid suggestion that we will consider.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he accept that new approaches are needed to deal with the shortage of nurses in Northern Ireland?

Mr Swann: As I said to the Member, that is something that we are well aware of. We need to retain the nursing staff that we have but also ensure that nursing is an attractive profession for people to go into. That is why we have the Executive commitment in New Decade, New Approach to deliver 900 additional places over the next three years, on top of our 1,025 training places. Delivering those additional places will go some way to filling the gap, but it will not address the current shortage.

How we re-engage nurses who have stepped out of the profession is a very valid question to raise. It ties in with the very welcome announcement by some of our health unions yesterday that they have suspended industrial action on the back of the work that the Department of Health and the Executive have been able to do to support

our nurses on pay parity and by our indicating that we are working towards having safe staffing. That applies to our Health and Social Care staff in all sectors, not just the nurses, and gives a clear indication of how much we value our nurses — our nurses especially — and the rest of the health professionals in our trusts.

Crisis Intervention Services: Londonderry

T3. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister of Health to outline what his Department is doing to ensure that much-needed funding for mental health support is provided to crisis intervention services in Londonderry, given that he will know that the Foyle constituency has suffered the devastating loss of far too many young people and people of all ages and will agree that one life lost is one too many. (AQT 153/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Member's comments included a line that I have used and which I believe: one life lost to suicide is one too many. In regards to the specifics of the crisis intervention services in Londonderry, I recently approved a £27,000 transformation slippage allowance to the Derry community crisis intervention service to allow bridge funding until the end of March. A multi-agency meeting led by Derry City and Strabane District Council will be required to consider funding options for 2020-21. The Department is committed in the Protect Life 2 suicide prevention strategy to providing:

"timely, accessible de-escalation services for those in emotional crisis or despair."

This and a range of other actions in the strategy will be dependent on additional funding being made available. Following the evaluation of the Derry community crisis intervention service, the Belfast crisis de-escalation service and the multi-agency triage teams, we will work further to do that. A wide range of suicide prevention and emotional health and well-being services are currently provided in the area, and the Lifeline 24/7 helpline is available for anyone who is in distress or despair.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for his response. I welcome the funding, and I am sure that he will join me in paying tribute to all the organisations that do fantastic work in the area of mental health and suicide. Does the Minister agree that, although the short-term funding that tides us over until March is welcome, we need to look at a long-term sustainable model to ensure that the tragedies that we have seen over the past number of days and weeks are brought down and that we get to a point where there is no suicide in our society?

Mr Swann: The Member makes a valid point that was raised earlier in regards to funding: If I had a three- or four-year surety of budget, the valuable and recognised work that is being done by the voluntary and community sector, supported by the Department and other funding streams, could continue with surety. When it comes to how we challenge mental health and the prevention of suicide, it is about how we join up the dots in Northern Ireland to bring together the voluntary and community sector, work in partnership with the Health and Social Care Trusts, and support families and individuals at that point in time. That is a vital piece of work that our voluntary and community sector does to prevent suicide.

Nursing Posts for £11 million

T4. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health how many new nurses would £11 million per annum employ, given that he will be aware that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister wish to spend £11 million of resources each year on Irish language and related provision. (AQT 154/17-22)

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his question. Off the top of my head — these figures will need to be verified — I think that a band 5 nurse is paid a salary in the region of £25,000, moving up to £40,000. If my maths is correct, that is 275 per year, but, again, that needs to be verified. I did maths at school and liked it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That was excellent; well done. [Laughter.]

Mr Allister: I congratulate the Minister on his maths, on the presumption that he is right. [Laughter.] Is it not a very perverse reflection on priorities if, in the straitened circumstances in which our present Budget exists, particularly in his Department, we were to take £11 million of such scarce resources and, each year, squander it on unnecessary matters while a Department like his goes short? If that situation comes about and his Executive colleagues persist with that squander, will he remain a member of that Executive?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for congratulating me on my maths. In regards to whether I will remain a member of the Executive, the Ulster Unionist Party is there by right under d'Hondt, so we will stay there to maintain our place. If at any point, we have to consider withdrawing, we will do that as a party. That will not be my decision; it will be one for the party.

In regard to funding for the Department of Health, I have already made it clear that we need £661 million to maintain where we are and to implement the other commitments in New Decade, New Approach. I have been working with Executive colleagues to ensure that we get that funding. In regard to funding our health service, I say to the Member, as I would to any Member, that I do not think that a Health Minister has ever stood in this place and said that they had enough money. Any money that is coming towards my Department will be fully welcomed and utilised.

Graduate Entry Medical School: Magee Campus

T5. **Ms Mullan** asked the Minister of Health to confirm that capital and resource funding are in place for the graduate entry medical school at Magee and to state when we can expect his official sign-off. (AQT 155/17-22)

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for her question. If she indulges me, I will try to find a recent update. Just before coming down here, we had an update from Minister Robin Walker from the Northern Ireland Office, who gave us clarification on the breakdown of revenue and capital. As I have such big files, I am unable to find that update, but I will supply it to the Member once I have it.

There are two business cases for a medical school at Magee. There is one that sits with Ulster University that my Department helped to formulate, and there is second one on the number of medical training places, which is sitting with my Department and is due to come to me shortly. The issue is how we get those two business cases to the same

place at the same point in time. It is an Executive decision because the graduate medical school at Magee has cross influence with the Department of Health, the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance.

Ms Mullan: I thank the Minister for his answer and the continued support that he provided for the project when he was the leader of his party. I invite the Minister to Derry to meet with the stakeholders involved.

Mr Swann: I welcome the Member's invitation. If she can find a space in my diary, I will be more than glad to come up and visit Londonderry.

Community Pharmacy: Funding Shortfall

T6. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health when he will address the shortfall in funding for community pharmacy services as identified in the 'Cost of Service Investigation for Community Pharmacy in Northern Ireland' report, which, although published in 2017, referred to 2011, which is some nine years ago. (AQT 156/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Member may be aware that, as of last night, Community Pharmacy NI has, unfortunately, decided to take industrial action. It is very disappointing for me that those contractors have voted to take industrial action at this time, particularly whilst discussions with their representatives were ongoing. I am due to meet Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland in the coming weeks, which means that the timing of today's announcement is regrettable because I would have liked to have had more engagement. The threat of industrial action is likely to cause unnecessary anxiety to some patients, and I want to reassure them and Community Pharmacy NI that the Department will be fully engaged in working with them to make sure that we get a resolution so that, hopefully, the industrial action does not happen.

Mr Frew: The Minister alluded to the point that I am going to make, namely that 98% of the community pharmacy contractors in attendance voted for industrial action. That shows you the measure and strength of frustration within the industry. The Minister must realise that frustration and try all he can to resolve the issue speedily.

Mr Swann: Again, the Member's point is well made. When I came into office, we were under the same stress and duress with our health unions. Working together with the board, departmental officials and Community Pharmacy NI, I would like to see the issue resolved before any action is necessary. That will involve engagement by everyone, which, I believe, there is a willingness to do, because nobody wants to go to a stage where they are taking industrial action because community pharmacy provides essential and valuable services to our community.

3.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr McGrath, you have 20 seconds, so it will be one question and one answer.

Diabetic Retinopathy Service: Downe Hospital

T7. **Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Health, given that he will know that early detection of diabetic retinopathy is critical to mitigate the impact of the condition, whether he will consider the Downe Hospital, which would be an ideal

location for such provision, for an early detection service, particularly because, at a meeting last week, the Downe community health committee agreed that it would like to arrange for a delegation to meet with him. (AQT 157/17-22)

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his question. I will certainly take up the invitation to meet them, again when we can fit it in. The diabetic eye-screening programme in the Downpatrick area is currently a mobile service provided by screeners and graders employed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The service visits individual GP practices, which host the screening. Any screening that is delivered on the Downe Hospital site is carried out in association with the on-site GP practice, rather than as the local trust delivering the service. That model remains in place, with screening continuing to be carried out on the site in recent months. A project led by the Public Health Agency is being established to take forward the implementation of recommendations on the future delivery, based on the findings from a public consultation that was carried out in 2019.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is the 'Down Recorder' sorted for Thursday. [Laughter.] I ask Members to take their ease, while there is a change at the Table.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA 2/17-22] be agreed. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

Mr Speaker: The next Member I want to call is Jonathan Buckley. As this is Jonathan's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech be made without interruption.

However, please note that, if you say anything provocative, you may well invoke an interruption from somebody else.

[Laughter.] Good luck in your maiden speech.

Mr Buckley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is, indeed, some relief that, after many years, I can finally say the words: in this my maiden speech to the Northern Ireland Assembly. I wish, with your indulgence, to begin by following the honourable tradition of paying tribute to my predecessor and friend, Mr Sydney Anderson. Sydney was a long-standing and highly esteemed servant to this House and to the people of Upper Bann. He provided me with my first opportunity in politics, and it is with the same unwavering determination that he demonstrated that I want to continue to represent the people of Upper Bann. He was a friend to many, always considered and thoughtful in his approach, and I take this opportunity to wish him and his family every blessing for the future. I also place on record my thanks to my party and, indeed, my party colleagues for placing in me the trust to represent the people in the Assembly. It is indeed an honour to sit on these Benches with my colleagues.

In March 2017, the people of Upper Bann entrusted me with representing them in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and for that I say thank you. I am deeply indebted to the great people of my constituency for enabling me to carry out this role on their behalf. I want to assure them that I will continue to serve with diligence and humility. Upper Bann has a very special place in my heart, as it is the constituency that I was born, raised and educated in. From the banks of the Bann in County Down to the apple trees of the orchard county, Upper Bann is a place I very proudly call home. I am humbled to represent its needs, hopes and ambitions here in this Chamber. To the people of Upper Bann, I make the commitment that everything I do in this place, as their elected representative, will be focused on the best interests of that great constituency and its people.

While I am extremely honoured to stand before you today, I do so in far from ideal circumstances. We gather in the Chamber to debate a Budget Bill after over 1,000 days of silence. In that time, I, like many others here, have done my utmost to represent my constituents, but let us be very clear that, during the time of absence, our most basic mechanisms for representing as legislators were stripped away, including what we are discussing today — the Budget Bill — as supposed stewards and defenders of the public finances.

As a young, unashamed unionist, I believe that it is totally unacceptable that Stormont lay barren for three years. The devastating effects of its inactivity are glaringly obvious

in this debate and, sadly, have grave implications on the Budget Bill presented by the Minister.

In my constituency of Upper Bann, I am often left in awe at the state of disrepair of some of our rural roads and the time it is taking to address the problems. I read recently with considerable interest that the combined depth of every pothole in Northern Ireland is nearly eight times the depth of the English Channel. That is a shocking statistic. In many of our constituencies, our constituents no longer travel on the left-hand side of the road; they travel on what is left of the road.

I welcome the fact that the Finance Minister released extra money to address some of those issues, though, sadly, we must accept that a piecemeal approach will not suffice. There must be long-term strategic funding for our road network and regional infrastructure to restore faith in the bemused taxpayer. I have witnessed the aftershocks of no devolved government in Upper Bann through the overwhelming strain on our public health workers at Craigavon Area Hospital. The staff are often faced with overcrowded wards, which makes their environment extremely testing, and the problem is compounded by staff shortages, as was mentioned earlier.

Some of my constituents have sadly described it in recent times as resembling a war zone, with patients lining the corridors, some elderly, not even being afforded the basic courtesy of a pillow. I emphasise the fact that each and every constituent to whom we talk places no blame at the foot of health workers. They pay tribute to them and how they have worked in such difficult circumstances, but I cannot but come to the conclusion that in many ways the system is broken. It is in much need of reform, which will require tough and mature political decision-making for the House.

I listened with considerable interest to the Finance Minister yesterday with initial disbelief as he became the custodian and defender of apparent lost money in the confidence-and-supply arrangement. I was filled with great emotion as I listened to the Finance Minister vow to go on a personal crusade throughout Whitehall to retrieve earmarked instalments, wrestling from the Exchequer what is rightfully ours in true Robin Hood-like fashion.

I know that the Minister is late to the game on this one, but I welcome the fact that, after three years of bemoaning the £1 billion secured by this party through confidence-and-supply, finally, although belatedly, Sinn Féin has realised that additional money for health, education and infrastructure at a time when these institutions were held to ransom was only a good thing.

Constituents ask simple questions, such as why their surgery has been delayed for over two years and why their children have to bring their own books to school. I remember talking to someone from a local primary school, which was even rationing soap to its pupils. What a sad reality of where this place got to. How did the House answer them? Sadly, with silence.

Some in the political class in Northern Ireland can only hang their heads in shame. It was a time of embarrassment for us all. In short, we failed people. It is now essential that we get back to basics and regain the trust of the electorate. These institutions must embrace reform, and that will require universal support in the House. There is absolutely no doubt that people in this country have suffered because of the length of time that it

has taken to restore Government and bring back political oversight and budgetary responsibility.

I want to turn our attention to mental health and suicide in Northern Ireland. I speak as someone, I am sure, like many in the House, who has been affected and seen at first hand the impact of suicide on a community. I was a 15-year-old pupil at Craigavon Senior High School when I first encountered the word “suicide”. Sadly, three young men in my school year, all with much to live for, took their life within one month. To this day, I think of their families and the pain that they endured at the time. Fourteen years on, it was with great sadness that I read the most recent statistics on suicide rates across the United Kingdom, which were released by the Samaritans. To our collective shame, the rate in Northern Ireland vastly exceeds rates in the rest of the United Kingdom. For every 100,000 men in Northern Ireland, 28 will die from suicide, compared with 15 men in England. Despite the disturbing suicide rate in this country, it continues to grow year-on-year. Per capita, Northern Ireland spends less than half the amount spent in England to support people who suffer with mental health issues.

I commit in the House to help to fight the destructive blight of suicide, which has caused unimaginable suffering across the Province. It is a vice that can be broken, but we need to act now. I welcome the seriousness with which the House and Executive have taken the issue of mental health and its sad consequences, though, in reality, much more can be done. I implore the Minister to continue his approach of additional cross-departmental budgetary allocations to facilitate the care and attention required to change lives. The issue transcends party politics. It cannot be good enough, whether you are from a unionist, nationalist or other persuasion, that people — citizens among us — feel that the only route left to them is suicide.

All the issues that I have raised have a common thread. I urge the Minister to pay particular attention to this point. In a climate of budgetary concern for Northern Ireland, these are all issues of universal importance. We have to get real and be prepared to make difficult decisions, prioritising the issues that matter to ordinary people in Northern Ireland. The pie can be cut into only so many parts.

In the House, we bear responsibility for the Budget and how it can be allocated most effectively to meet people’s needs. In doing so, we are required to work together towards the common purpose of a better future. The framework for good governance requires cohesion and cooperation. We will achieve nothing by employing the same divisive agendas in a hostile environment. There is no doubt that the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union is a polarising matter and one that divides the House immensely. Many in the House passionately oppose the direction that the United Kingdom has taken, particularly in relation to the Brexit Bill, but that is the reality that we all must face. In a spirit of unity and collaboration, we must work together to ensure that Northern Ireland leaves on the best possible terms. Opposing barriers to trade with our largest market, we must strive to lay the economic foundations on which the economy and people here can flourish. We can do so only collectively. I have no doubt that that will impact on future Budgets in the House.

3.45 pm

When you take the time to talk to broader international opinion about Brexit and Northern Ireland, yes, those people understand the concerns that we have from a nationalist or republican perspective and, indeed, from a unionist perspective, but they are somewhat bewildered by the constant pessimism that comes from the elected classes in Northern Ireland. Yes, we have challenging situations ahead, but we must look on Brexit through the lens of opportunity, and let us use the assets and resources that we have, be that our geographical location or, indeed, our greatest asset of all: our people.

Taking all that into consideration, I wish to conclude by saying that the people of this country deserve two things: healing and hope; healing from our fraught and fractured past and a deep hope for our future. When the pens of historians scribe the days in which we live in Northern Ireland, will the pages read of despair and disbelief? Potentially. However, I believe we stand here today with the potential in this room to ensure that the story reads of a country filled with hope and anticipation. From Portrush to Portadown, from Larne to Lisnaskea there is hope, but only — this is key — if the Assembly functions not on sectarian or narrow party political lines but — I truly believe there is hope for this — as an Assembly in which Members debate and legislate for a Budget with the interests of the working family, the local businessman and woman, the farmer, the graduate, the nurse and the nursery school student in mind. It is to those people that the Assembly has the unrestricted ability to bring hope, but it cannot be the case that the good news story from these institutions is that government exists. It must begin to deliver for people. The era of the sound bite is over. Our people simply will not put up with it, and that is what I meant when I talked about the disbelief when the Assembly, rightly, looked to climate change and declared a climate emergency. That stands in stark contrast to the state of our public transport in this country. We must be practical; we must be real.

In closing, let me say that we celebrate the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021. I trust the message will be one of healing and hope. As the youngest unionist Member, I plead with Members to make this new approach work. In this new Assembly, I challenge each Member to lay aside our differences and work for the betterment of the people we have let down over the past three years of inactivity. I urge every Member to join me in my commitment to humbly serve and deliver for the people of this country, because that is simply what they deserve from every MLA.

Ms Mullan: I will speak as our party’s education spokesperson. We are discussing the Second Stage of the Budget Bill, which will allow finances to flow to our vital public services while providing the space for the Minister of Finance to seek further resources and work with the Executive and Assembly to finalise the Budget for the incoming year. That said, it cannot be ignored that, for close to a decade, public services here have been under attack from Tory Governments in London. Our children and education system have borne the brunt of the Conservative Party’s crusade of cuts. That relentless austerity agenda has stripped well over £200 million from the education budget over the last 10 years. If we look at the last five years, we will see that the situation speaks for itself. The number of schools in deficit has risen from 217 to 442. In addition, the number of schools in surplus

has fallen from 817 to 562. Members are well aware of the real impact that budget cuts have on school communities. The Minister of Finance and the Executive have indicated that they intend to move towards multi-annual Budgets, and I welcome that. However, education, teachers and pupils cannot wait. The work of properly resourcing and reforming our education system has to begin now. As the Chair of the Education Committee highlighted, despite the Department receiving funding from in-year monitoring of £90 million, it is expected that the Education Authority will still have a £20 million overspend.

I acknowledge the work of the permanent secretary and officials in the Department of Education over the past three years in bidding for extra funding to stop further cuts and to secure a budget for transformation. It is vital that the transformation project happens and that we show leadership on issues such as area planning. Our education system cannot plan, prepare or function properly if constantly constrained by austerity. We have all heard about teachers having to buy essential items because their school's budget has been stretched too thin: that is unacceptable.

As other Members have said, special educational need is a particular area that has been starved of resources and investment. The Education Authority has consistently exceeded its budget for it. That highlights the shortage of funding going to special educational needs provision, and the Budget should resource it.

Commitments arising from the 'New Decade, New Approach' document will add further pressure to the education system unless accompanied by the associated resources. I commend the work of the Finance Minister in engaging with the British Government to try to get them to live up to their obligations. The Department of Education faces pressures of over £400 million in the coming financial year. The position is stark. With those pressures in mind, there is an onus on Departments to facilitate greater collaboration and cooperation. Over the past number of weeks, the Education Committee has received briefings on that work, but we need to see greater evidence, alongside cross-departmental financial investments.

I welcome the Minister's update that Departments should and will be encouraged to share the costs of achieving common outcomes. The Programme for Government and New Decade, New Approach commit the Executive and the Assembly to delivering services and resources based on objective need and to tackling regional disparities. In the Budget, I urge the Executive to be imaginative and rigorous in their determination to ensure that places such as Derry benefit and develop as of right. To do that, we need meaningful, time-bound targets on job creation and Derry to be connected to Belfast, Dublin and further afield. As a catalyst and as a sign of intent from the Executive, we need 10,000 graduate students in Derry.

Mr O'Toole: I thank the Minister for enduring a long couple of days, including Question Time today and yesterday's debate. Yesterday, we discussed the 2019-2020 Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account; today, we discuss the Budget Bill, which gives legal effect to those Estimates and the Vote on Account.

The name of the Bill is liable to be misunderstood. Contrary to what it says on the face of the Bill, it is not a

Budget. It is not a list of financial priorities or commitments. The Executive have not yet decided what their full-year priorities are, nor do we know the outworkings of either the UK Budget on 11 March or the spending review plan for later this year or, indeed, the second Budget that is provisionally due to happen this autumn. This is legislation to give permission for money that has already been spent in the financial year that is just finishing and to ensure continuity in the first few months of the new financial year. However, the Bill is symbolically as well as legally important. Civil servants have been exposed to significant political and legal risk over the past three years by effectively having to roll over budgets, with only the most scant oversight from the Northern Ireland Office and MPs in Westminster. Woody Allen said:

"90% of success in life is simply turning up."

For three years, the Northern Ireland Assembly was not even doing that.

The Finance Committee agreed to accelerated passage for the Bill but with clear reservations about the level of scrutiny to which the retrospective spending or authorising has been subjected. The Deputy Chair of the Committee spoke about that earlier, but we are where we are. I congratulate the vice chair for stepping into the breach this morning at short notice to give the relevant permissions on behalf of the Committee.

Rather than focusing on specific spending priorities, which, I know, is in vogue today, as my party's finance spokesperson, I want to use the debate to give a broader focus of Northern Ireland's finances and the challenges that lie ahead in setting a Budget that aligns with the Programme for Government and delivers on outcomes that citizens care about. I also want to address some bigger questions about fiscal oversight and fiscal sustainability.

First, it is worth saying that devolved budget processes in this place are quite strange. They are an odd mix of conventions that have been borrowed from Westminster and specific legal obligations on the Minister that come from the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This year, the budget process is even odder. Today, for example, we are authorising spending for a Budget that was never submitted to the Assembly in the first place, let alone debated. As well as being asked to retrospectively approve a Budget that was cobbled together or copied and pasted by civil servants in the absence of elected officials — I say that with due respect to the civil servants who had to do that — we have a public spending context that has been confused by multiple, sometimes contradictory, communications to the public on budgets and public spending. I do not say that to make a party political point; I say it almost to say to people, on behalf of the Assembly, that the way in which public spending works in Northern Ireland is weird and confusing because of the succession of agreements and commitments that have come along at different times. It can get fairly bewildering for the public.

The supply and confidence arrangements that were agreed between the DUP and the then Conservative Government two and a half years ago created an expectation of a surge of additional spending; in fact — this is not a criticism of the party opposite — most of the resource was consumed by current spending pressures, especially in health. We have heard today about the level of pressure in the Department of Health.

Since then, we have had continuity budgets passed at Westminster in the cut-and-paste way I described, in the political circumstances, and we have had some new Barnett consequentialists from assorted UK Government announcements; indeed, we have had negative Barnett consequentialists, as we have discussed with the Finance Minister, over the past week or two. We also, of course, had the 'New Decade, New Approach' document earlier this year. That deal involved a long list of potential Executive priorities that parties here signed up to, along with unquantified financial commitments from the UK Government. When the Northern Ireland Office finally agreed a package of support with the Treasury, it was self-evidently a long way from addressing current spending pressures in Northern Ireland public services, let alone providing adequate funding for the priorities listed in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. That experience was a stark illustration of one of the major challenges that we face in this place in the budget process: cynicism. There is an ingrained and pernicious cynicism in Westminster and Whitehall about Northern Ireland and its approach to spending. Some of that is understandable, but some of it is not. I will go on to discuss both.

In the Assembly, we have to be honest with ourselves. Whatever the outcome of the RHI inquiry in a couple of weeks, some of the cynicism is justified. We know that large amounts of public money were wasted; we know that there was a cavalier attitude to spending. People thought that AME — annually managed expenditure — for RHI should be maxed out like a credit card without a limit; otherwise it would be "lost to Northern Ireland". I was intrigued and possibly slightly gratified to hear what colleagues from the DUP said. A little like the policeman in 'Casablanca', they were, "Shocked, shocked" at the idea of public money being wasted, but I am glad to hear of their new-found commitment to the cause of fiscal rectitude.

We should pause and think for a moment about why we spend public money. As the finance spokesperson for a centre-left social democratic party, I want to see a large and active state that spends resources to improve people's lives, but, in truth, money in RHI was burned to no good end. Our roads need upgraded, our rail and bus network is in a funding crisis and the health service is buckling, but we chose to spend tens if not hundreds of millions on heating poultry sheds. We need to be honest about the scepticism that this place must overcome in agreeing and setting a Budget — scepticism from the public who elected us and, unfortunately, from politicians and officials in London who have an uncomfortably large amount of power over the resources that are available to the Executive. Just in parenthesis, we have to be honest with ourselves too about the changing politics in Westminster and the fact that Boris Johnson has been elected by an English nationalist vote, essentially. They do not feel the same way about spending on other parts of what some people describe as the "precious Union" as, perhaps, their predecessors did, and we have to be honest with ourselves about that.

Whatever the excesses of RHI mismanagement, they pale in comparison with the cynicism of the current UK Government, all of which is relevant to the spending predicament that we find ourselves in.

4.00 pm

Others have mentioned the appalling new immigration proposals announced last week that almost look like they were specifically designed to harm the Northern Ireland economy. On Sunday, we saw a cynical briefing to the effect that UK Ministers were trying to find ways to undermine or circumvent the Ireland protocol that they signed in a legally binding international treaty just a few months ago. Even if that newspaper briefing was a stunt to influence the EU negotiations — I note that, in the past couple of hours, the EU council has just signed off its official mandate for the trade talks — it shows a real contempt for the people of this place. In the past few weeks, we have also seen the UK Prime Minister speculate about building a bridge between Scotland and Ireland. Like many authoritarian narcissists, he has a fondness for monuments to himself and a weakness for making promises that, he knows, he will not keep. Members already know about his broken promises. We also know where money genuinely needs to be spent, especially on things like infrastructure delivery. What all of that highlights is the extent of UK Government cynicism in relation to Northern Ireland.

We have to note at this point, as colleagues in the Assembly Chamber have done, that we are living with and recovering from the effects of a decade of austerity. That has had a real, serious, measurable impact on public services in Northern Ireland, and we are still recovering from it in a sense.

What does all that mean for the Budget; not the Budget Bill that we are debating today but the Budget that the Minister will bring forward in the weeks ahead? It means that, as the Executive develop a Budget and the Assembly scrutinises it, we need to be mindful of the perception of these institutions in Northern Ireland and further afield. In the Finance Committee, we are working to improve scrutiny processes, and we have heard commitments from the Department on how it intends to improve transparency and rigour in the Budget process. That includes the forever-delayed promise of a fiscal council for Northern Ireland that was first mooted more than a decade ago. If we are to give our citizens a clearer sense of how and where the Executive choose to spend money, we should welcome a genuinely robust and independent fiscal watchdog. We should insist that it also has economic forecasting powers, much as the Office for Budget Responsibility in London does, because fiscal scrutiny is only part of the picture. I agree with the Finance Minister that an independent fiscal commission, along the lines of the one in Scotland, should be considered. The commission should look at the long-term profile of Northern Ireland's public spending, along with its economic prospects. Whatever your constitutional perspective, it is no one's interest that we do so little long-term economic and fiscal planning in this place and are forced constantly to submit to the whims and, sometimes, cynicism of individual Ministers and officials in London, and I speak, in truth, as a former official from London.

Let me just make the point in parenthesis — I say this with respect to some of the colleagues opposite — that it is a fairly dismal constitutional argument that Northern Ireland must always be in permanent deficit to London. That cannot be, I am sure, the strongest argument that they can come up with about our current constitutional position.

I hope that the Budget that the Executive develop in the weeks ahead will help to address the real and urgent needs being faced by our public services, as well as properly directing capital spending in what is still one of the most unproductive parts of these islands and, indeed, western Europe. This is just another point in parenthesis, to repeat something that we talked about yesterday: despite the pressure that we are under and despite the real consensus that there is on the need to focus capital spending, we are still handing back capital money this year. We know that the Treasury has come back to us in the last few weeks with a negative Barnett consequential that will lower the baseline for capital spending next year. It has to be a real focus for civil servants to ensure that we get capital money spent in order to make our economy more productive and to deliver infrastructure and other capital projects.

I hope that we start to put in place the foundations of a more serious and coherent approach to budgeting in a way that is more joined up with Executive priorities. Multi-year budgets should be a part of that. It will be a big ask, and it is a lot to deliver. Other Members have talked about the importance of multi-year Budgets, and I agree with them. We as an Assembly need to scrutinise much more robustly, whatever the demands of a five-party coalition. We face real cynicism among citizens about our ability to spend money properly on the things that matter to them. If we do not get this right, they will rightly judge us as a Potemkin parliament, rather than a real Assembly doing real government.

Dr Aiken: Mr Speaker, I start with an apology for not being in my place this morning. I thank my able deputy, Paul Frew, for stepping in at short notice and for making the statement on the Budget Bill today. I also echo the fine words of my fellow member of the Committee. I promise you, Mr Speaker, that we have not coordinated our remarks, but many of mine will be very similar in what we are trying to say and what we are going to do.

As we have seen in recent days, there is considerable disquiet in Northern Ireland about the extent of our funding crisis. All of us, as MLAs, owe the people an apology for our collective failure to tackle the problems that have been developing not just over the last couple of years but over the last decade; indeed, the failure to make critical decisions on education, health, infrastructure, housing, the economy and more have demonstrated the failings of our fragmented and, I am afraid, stagnated decision-making process. While there is, perhaps, a justifiable belief in some quarters that Northern Ireland has been overly subjected to the vagaries of austerity and shortfalls in commitments, we have to understand that, in our public finances, our Administration have grossly mismanaged the moneys — in some cases, beyond negligence. They are resources that are provided by our taxes and those of our companies and businesses through our payments of rates and VAT here and across all of our great nation. The fact that some of it is in the form of annually managed expenditure or AME does not mean that it is free cash, despite what some parties may think. A fundamental question has to be this: do we get value for money from our public moneys? Do we effectively manage that money? Clearly, in the words of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on major infrastructure projects, we do not:

“While accepting that project delivery problems are not unique to Northern Ireland, it is disappointing that, in the 11 high-profile projects considered in this report, costs and timescales envisaged at the outset of projects were not achieved. Even flagship projects identified as the Northern Ireland Executive’s highest priority and with funding secured over a longer period have suffered time delays and/or cost overruns.”

Indeed, we have even managed to spend close on £80 million on the A5 and not one square metre of tarmac has been laid. That is nothing short of a disgrace.

Now, we are considering the Budget Bill that we, as MLAs, have been asked to pass; reluctantly, I ask them to do so. However, we should do that on the basis of a Programme for Government that has been properly assessed and tested for affordability. Since the Stormont House Agreement, the Ulster Unionist Party has called for a fiscal council, probably so-called because some parties could not accept that we must, indeed, have an office for budget responsibility as in other regions of these islands. Such a council would independently report on the affordability and value for money that our public moneys provide. We must demonstrate that there is accountability and responsibility for all of our expenditure.

We are entering a period where no political parties can shirk their responsibilities. Can we really afford £28 million for an office of identity or whatever when the roofs of our schools leak and our public transport system is about to go bust? Are we really going to spend £150 million-plus on investigating the past, while struggling to recruit and retain 7,500 police officers that we need now? How much more will we allocate and spend on extortionate university cost overruns, when one of our biggest exports is our children, who would rather go to a university across in Great Britain, while we still manage to pay vice-chancellors nearly £250,000 a year in salaries? As to the free money that some seem to be wedded to, when we have access to £100 million-plus of financial transactions capital, we cannot even spend it.

As politicians, we have collectively failed the people of Northern Ireland. We now have the option to start putting that right. The blank chequebook is no more, and the Finance Minister’s party, if it ever gets into power in the Irish Republic, will discover that. Fiscal accountability and responsible spending must be the new normal. We must put an end to pet projects and actually deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. Per head of population across all these islands — north, south, east or west — we have the highest government spending. Can we really say that we have the best healthcare, education, public transport, universities or even roads? Are our social housing, our mental health provision, our support to our armed forces veterans even adequate? The answer to all these points, I am afraid, is a categorical “No”. We need to change. We need to change our culture of dependency and, at long last, to make the right decisions for all our people.

As I have outlined, while we reluctantly agree to the Budget, we must now with urgency, if we are to move to effective future multi-year budgeting, introduce more than a sense of realism into our fiscal management. We must also, again with proper weighting and the rest of it and a degree of urgency, change the culture of inefficiency, lack of accountability and responsibility and, frankly, profligate waste. We will continue

to press for good public services, but we must change from constantly asking to be bailed out by the rest of our nation. We should be setting a priority for restoring Northern Ireland to the path of prosperity rather than dependency. As MLAs, we now have a major task ahead of us, and a future responsibility for a realistic Programme for Government will be an appropriate starting point.

Mrs Cameron: I will make some brief remarks on the Department of Health as DUP Committee lead and as a member of the Health Committee.

The 'New Decade, New Approach' document, which is essentially the manifesto of the House, makes it clear that health is a priority in this mandate. That is entirely appropriate, given the waiting list crisis and the pressing challenges that we find ourselves facing. However, like any manifesto, New Decade, New Approach requires money to deliver its objectives. Last week, the Minister outlined his needs in the media. That was £661 million to meet the objectives of New Decade, New Approach and to maintain current services. That was the headline, but we need to delve beneath the headline and explore how we can do things better, how money can be better spent and how each pound can and must do more. The Minister also needs to be brave and explore what changes can be made to assist us to meet the demands of a growing and ever-ageing population, which is a good thing, of course, the challenges around growing levels of obesity and the health challenges that all those issues pose.

When it comes to funding health, my party will not be found wanting. However, as well as investing money, we as a legislature, Executive and Committee must pursue the long-awaited reform of our health service that is so badly needed, to allow us to transform health and social care in Northern Ireland. How long will we talk about it without enacting the change required to transform services? It has become clear that the reform that has started, thanks to the confidence-and-supply moneys, needs a surge of investment in order to effect the changes so desperately needed for our health service to survive. Delay causes decay, and that needs to be addressed with urgency before the decline is terminal.

I want to mention some specifics in relation to the health budget, the first of which is pay for health workers. We all heard on the doorstep and from speaking to nurses and other healthcare staff the frustration on lack of pay parity and agreed that the matter needed to be addressed. Our nurses, in particular, do an incredible job and deserve to be rewarded with an appropriate level of pay. It is more than appropriate that nurses are appreciated, and we need to make that right.

We also look at New Decade, New Approach and the commitment to deliver three cycles of IVF to people looking to start a family. That was debated at length last week, and, as a House, we rightly reaffirmed that commitment. The money must be provided in the Budget and moves made by the Minister to address it as a matter of urgency, given that, for some, the clock is ticking loudly. I, for one, do not underestimate the challenge in delivering on this commitment alone, given the issues around capacity. I cannot let the subject go without referring to the agreed amendment on the recent motion that called for early intervention through an education programme to raise awareness and protect fertility. That is the type

of intervention that should result in less reliance on IVF treatment in the years to come.

4.15 pm

We must ensure that the contaminated blood victims' hopes for proper recognition and compensation are delivered on. The Chair and I have met groups who are retraumatised daily by having to lobby for something that should not have to be asked for in the first place. I know that the Minister wishes to deliver for those victims, and it is right that the House supports him in doing so. Compensation cannot give those individuals back their full health and strength, but it can help to ease the everyday struggles that receiving contaminated blood means for their lives and those of their families. I am pleased that the victims of contaminated blood are now in receipt of some of the compensation payment that is due to them. I urge the Minister to ensure that the entirety of the £1 million allocation makes its way directly and swiftly to those who suffer horrendously through no fault of their own and to ensure that provision is made for the future.

We must also focus on the mental health crisis that faces our community in Northern Ireland. We have heard how, for many, mental illness starts in teenage years and becomes a lifelong struggle. Mental health, just like our physical health, needs to be taken care of. I am glad that we, as a society, talk more about our mental health. We all have good and bad mental health at stages throughout life, for many reasons. Many in our constituencies are in need of help. The Executive must resource that aspect of healthcare in a manner that reflects the growing severity of the situation that we face.

As Chair of the all-party group on autism, let me also make clear the need for substantial investment in caring for those with ASD. Let us prioritise the acceleration of the diagnosis process. Let us put in place the necessary support, whether that is behavioural, dietary or speech and language therapy. With the rate of autism rising in Northern Ireland and many children being diagnosed, it is our duty to provide the interventions that can make life better for those with a diagnosis and their families.

Our key priority must be an effective front-line health service that meets the needs of all those who call on it. I share the public frustration with waiting times in our A&E departments; for long-awaited and much-needed surgical procedures; to see the local GP; and in many more aspects of our NHS. Much can be done to address those issues, whether that is additional funding to train more doctors and nurses; use of the private sector to address some of the totally unacceptable elective care waiting lists; or the roll-out of pilot projects such as the one funded in the Northern Trust recently, whereby GPs, rather than visiting their own patients in a nursing or residential home, see all those who need attention there on the same visit. That programme reduced needless admissions to hospital and the demand on ambulance services. It is the type of programme, piloted through confidence-and-supply money, that is in immediate need of continued funding across Northern Ireland to ensure that we start to meaningfully tackle the ever-increasing demands on services in a common-sense and compassionate way.

I have not even touched on the value and necessity of pharmacy in Northern Ireland and the huge role that pharmacists' expertise has in preventing unnecessary,

expensive hospital admissions, and we must not forget the role of physiotherapists. We have so much talent to call on in 2020 but only if the issues are given the priority in the Budget that they merit. It is vital that the appropriate moneys are invested in the use of technology and artificial intelligence. I certainly look forward to hearing more from the departmental officials soon about the new encompass programme and what it will mean for streamlining the health service in Northern Ireland. I trust that it will bring different technological systems together and, in turn, aid the Department's planning and management. It is time to embrace artificial intelligence and ask what potential it has to improve our health service. We must prioritise prevention.

Developing next-generation healthcare by implementing Bengoa and investing in new services, GPs and health staff, tackling waiting lists, embracing AI and new technology and prioritising prevention should be our manifesto for health. We must bring about a new future for mental health services by boosting prevention, leading on trauma and increasing investment to transform services. Let this be the Executive who start to turn the tide on all those issues, to turn the corner and see the real and meaningful improvement that we need. That is the challenge: the reward is a healthier, happier population. I finish by wishing Minister Swann well in office.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Fáiltím roimh an Bhille ón Aire, agus ba mhaith liom ráiteas gairid a dhéanamh ar an Bhille. I thank the Minister for bringing forward the Bill. I want to say a few words, like everyone else.

Yesterday's debate was interesting, and, actually, today's debate has been interesting. It might not be as interesting for the Minister because he has had to endure this and a Question Time. Even though there have been disagreements in the Chamber about the way certain things have happened, everybody has taken into consideration not being here for three years and the way in which money was spent or even not spent during that period. We all know that the process is about gathering up the Supplementary Estimates and Supply resolution. We will have the Budget Bill in the future, and we will probably have the same debate again, if we are honest, maybe with some tweaks.

I want to make the point that we are not just saying that we need to look at fiscal flexibilities or even fiscal autonomy in raising our moneys. We are not just saying it from an ideological point of view; we are saying it because we do not have enough money in the grant. We are at the mercy of a Tory Budget and Tory austerity, whether you call it "Conservatism", "Tories" or whatever or maybe something else that would not be recorded in Hansard. Either way, we all have problems with the way money needs to be spent and targeted towards those who need it most, and that is sometimes where the twain do not meet. I remember, when I was in DCAL, giving money to Health and Education. I cut my budget to do that because it was the right thing to do. When you ask the Finance Minister to be brave, those are the sorts of things that we need to look at, regardless of who is in the Department. We need to prioritise the services that all our citizens rely on, and the money that we need to supply those services is very important.

I also want to make the point that it is worrying that, when you look at the whole budgeting process or even the lack of it — that is what we meant when we talked

about the lack of transparency — you see that, while the British Government have made commitments in 'New Decade, New Approach', they certainly have not been as forthcoming about who will pay for them. Those are commitments that all the parties who were involved in the discussions and negotiations raised as very important. A lot of us, regardless of what priority we give to them, will certainly be able to see something that, we all felt, citizens and constituents needed to see a difference in. More importantly, the British Government need to invest — along with the Irish Government but more so the British Government — due to the consequences of the legacy of the past and all that that brings. We will all come at these debates on money and budgets from a different position, and we all may have different ideas about what needs to be priority one, two, three or four.

I listened to Andrew blame us all for the cost of division. There was no mention of the British Government or anybody else's role, for that matter, but I accept his point. I live in north Belfast. I do not want to see interfaces there for evermore. I am one of the people who stood on interfaces to make sure that kids did not go in jail and ended up in the Mater A&E. I want them gone, but I also want consultation with the residents first rather than some grandiose statements, because they are the people and the community and they need to be consulted. Do I want to see them gone? Absolutely. I am with you on that. I am also with you on sharing services in education as long as parents are consulted. We go through primary education and maybe go to a post-primary school and even to third-level education. The first time I met somebody from the opposite side of Belfast, never mind somebody of another religion, was the first time I put my foot in university. That is the experience for a lot of people of my age.

We need to take all this in the round. If we have made commitments, which we have, to take the big issues on, we also need to work out at what stage we take them on. That is part of political discourse. There will be some legislation — the Budget Bill is no exception — that will be done through the accelerated passage process. That is the last option for anyone. It is the last resort rather than the first option. We all got to read the Budget in our Committees, and, if you had more time, you could say more things, but, essentially, we were all given the opportunity to raise our concerns. I am not saying this just because she is my colleague, but, even in the short time that we have been here and with the small bits of money that we have — more is needed — Deirdre Hargey has been able to make decisions on bedroom tax and her intention to set that pathway out. She has also talked about protecting people who are very vulnerable and about the need to consider how we look at housing. Yes, it will take loads of money and new ways —.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly.

Mr Storey: The Member knows about this, because she and I have had the discussion. When will the party opposite, along with their colleagues in the SDLP, recognise that the Housing Executive's current structure is not fit for purpose? I want good housing in your constituency just as I want it in mine, but report after report has stated that there needs to be a change in the way in which the Housing Executive borrows money. When will we get to a point beyond the rhetoric and make a decision

similar to what the Minister has done with the bedroom tax? That was the right thing to do, but, remember, it has had consequences for the block grant, out of which we run this part of the United Kingdom.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his intervention. He is right: we have had the discussion before. We have had some rows as well, but the good thing is that we were still talking afterwards. That is politics. It is good politics.

We will not agree on a lot of things, but one thing that I agree with you on is that all citizens need good services, and housing is one such service. The Housing Executive emerged from the fact that there was discrimination in councils, and the model has been there for a long time. Is the Housing Executive delivering housing in the way in which it was intended to? No, it is not. The reason that it is not is that it is only in 'New Decade, New Approach' that there has been an agreement to exclude it from paying corporation tax and to get rid of the historical debt that came to the Housing Executive from local government. We need to look at its vires to build houses and do better, but we also need to look at other systems and structures that are fit for purpose in the 21st century. I imagine that we will have the same conversation with Deirdre Hargey and officials from DFC. I am not neuralgic about that; what I am passionate about is that, regardless of who people are, it is about need not creed, and it should never have been that way. It was what it was, but we are now moving forward.

I doubt that your constituency needs more houses than mine does, but, if it did, I would support them being built, and that is the way in which we need to continue. Your constituency has needs, but there are needs in all our constituencies. For example, there may be a need for more family homes in my constituency and for more homes for older people and those with disabilities elsewhere. We need to scope out what the need is and try to deliver on it. There are those who do not have a roof over their head or an address of their own, and there are homes in which three or four generations live under one roof. That is humiliating. Kids grow up with mental health problems that they never had before. There is no privacy. There is no space to grow, to make mistakes, to listen to music or to have a shower: all that stuff. I see it in my constituency — I see it in my family — so this is not just politic rhetoric. Who would want that? No one wants it, but we need to look at ways in which we can raise money to add to the block grant to try to begin to deliver to meet the need.

At the minute, there are 36,000 people on the housing waiting list, 26,500 of whom are in housing stress. Who wants that on their watch? None of us does. It is a five-party Executive, and we do not want that, but we also need to look at other ways of dealing with it. For example, yesterday, you or someone else described the sums of financial transactions capital that were sent back as "eye-watering". I have complete confidence that that will not happen again. Of the 16 categories, five belong to DFC, covering housing for people with disabilities, empty homes and other things that we have all called for in previous debates in this mandate, the previous mandate and the one before that. Other things will take not a pile of money, just the political will. We need those responsible to get cracking, and that is one of the things that we need to look at.

We also need to look at procurement, particularly if we are buying in. For example, we have all spoken to different sectors, particularly in the past couple of years. The

construction sector will tell us that it is good to go and just needs the projects, but the projects in the construction sector do not have apprenticeships.

They need to have the apprenticeships in order to get the social clauses, in order to build houses, and so on and so forth. Can it be fixed? It absolutely can.

4.30 pm

The way in which New Decade, New Approach laid out co-design and participation will be pivotal, particularly in the next Budget process, for not just us as elected representatives, but for people involved in the community and voluntary sector. No disrespect to any of the big community and voluntary sector groups, but I would like to see the smaller groups having the ability to get involved in the process as well. Often enough, the big community and voluntary sector groups do a great job, but they do not always speak on behalf of the smaller groups that we all know. To be quite honest, there is nothing empowering about somebody sending you a message on WhatsApp about a meeting that you were not at or, worse still, that you did not even know about.

We need to have fiscal powers and the ability to raise our own funds for planning. Matthew spoke about the Scottish model and commissioning. There is good practice on this island and across these islands, and we need to gather all those up. It will not be for the next Budget process and it might not be for the one after that, but it will certainly be for the next mandate. I would like us, collectively, to — it was mentioned yesterday, and it has certainly been mentioned today — look at the processes and try to bed down roots for those coming behind us, irrespective of who takes the Departments, to make sure that we do not have another report from Kieran Donnelly, as nice a man as he is, that talks about, as you referred to earlier, the eye-watering sum of £700 million. The RHI report will come out, and lessons will be learned. I hope that you are wrong, Mervyn, that some of the officials who may be implicated in that are obviously going to work elsewhere, but I do not want to make any comment on any of that stuff. I will respect the decision. What we all know is that substantial sums of public money, going from millions to tens of millions to hundreds of millions, have potentially literally gone up the chimney. Who wants that? No one does.

We want to make sure that, whatever Budget process comes forward, as you did when you were the Minister, and as we will do in our Committees, we will be reading. If there is anything that we have learned from RHI, it is that everybody will read their papers and then some, and reading them again and then some. That affects us all. It was certainly in the middle of a crisis that caused us all sorts of problems.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly.

Mr Storey: I appreciate the fact that the Member and I are having this conversation, because it seems that she is always looking across at me on these issues. Maybe we will involve the rest of the Members. She made reference to reading papers. I am not trying to be clever or facetious, but we discovered today that Casement Park requires an additional £33 million. That is eye-watering. Who was not reading their papers when the original business case came into your Department and your successor's Department?

I have been where the Finance Minister is and where Minister Hargey is; it is very difficult and challenging to read every paper that comes across your desk. However, when you have a paper now that says that there is £33 million of a deficit, are we not all collectively responsible for taking our eye off the ball on many of these issues?

Mr Speaker: Could I just make a wee point by way of intervention? This is becoming a very interesting conversation [*Laughter*] but we are somewhat straying off the subject of the Budget in the Order Paper today.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assure you, a Cheann Comhairle, that I will stick to the Budget. I am afraid to look at Mervyn in case he thinks that there are any notions. [*Laughter.*] Let me say for the record that there absolutely are not. I am looking at him because I actually listened to him yesterday and today, but I am going to look at you now, a Cheann Comhairle, and I am going to talk about the Budget.

The Member has given me an opportunity to talk about Casement Park, and he is probably going to kick himself for doing so. Nelson McCausland approved the original business case, and I lifted it and took it. I brought Casement Park to planning, but it failed planning on traffic management. Since then, like the A5 and other big projects, lots of zeros are ticking up, but not a sod has been cut. That is not good enough on my watch or anybody else's watch. It needs to be delivered, because it was part of a stadia development programme at a cost of £110 million which the previous Executive signed up to and which we have all carried forward since. The subregional programme needs to be consulted on, as does the next one and the one after that. The point is this: are there lessons to be learned? There absolutely are. That is the point that I made earlier about budgeting.

We were talking about the Estimates yesterday and the Supply resolution, we are going through this debate today and we will probably have the same, if not similar, debates when the Budget comes forward. However, if you were to lift the conclusions from RHI whenever they come, the different audit reports that have come through Kieran Donnelly's office and some of the lessons that we have learned from our own Departments, we could save hundreds of millions of pounds. If we make a commitment to do that, that is fine. I will finish on this —.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. I heard subregional stadia mentioned, and, as a member of the Communities Committee, along with the Member, I understand the great need to implement the subregional stadia funding. Does the Member believe that the available funding is adequate to deliver on the demand that is there?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not the Minister for sport now, but does sport need more money? Yes it does. Do grassroots sports, which keep people healthy and, at times, keep people alive — literally at times — need more money? Yes, they do. Do we need to reduce obesity, heart problems and circulation problems? Do we need to increase participation, inclusion and all those things that sport brings? Yes, absolutely. I am not going to say any more than that, because I am conscious that Conor and Deirdre are responsible, along with Executive colleagues, for bringing that forward. I appreciate the Member's intervention.

I will finish on this. The next serious conversation needs to be about raising our own money and what we can do

across the island. In terms of the Barnett consequential that came forward, and we hear that there was a reduction in some this week, we are not getting some of the consequential invested in England, and we need to look at that. The issue for us is deciding what to do with the money that we have in a period of Tory austerity, which looks like it will last for a long time. We have a particularly emboldened British Prime Minister who has a vote on the back of an increasing sense of British nationalism. Those who have less are going to get less, and those who have more are going to get more, and none of us in this House want that. I appreciate the Minister bringing the Bill forward, and I look forward to the Budget debate.

Mr Speaker: I call John Blair. I have every confidence, Mr Blair, that you will stick to the Budget discussion. There are 16 Members yet to speak.

Mr Blair: Mr Speaker, thank you. I promise you that I will do my best to stick to those guidelines. I cannot promise to match in quality or duration the previous exchange across the Chamber, but I will do my best to stick to the guidelines that you have outlined.

It is opportune that I am following Carál Ní Chuilín because I was going to refer, in the speech that I prepared, to my experience of working as a civil servant when she was a Minister. I worked in Inland Fisheries when Carál was my Minister, and I am therefore poacher turned gamekeeper in every respect. I know also from that experience that ministerial drive and support of staff in the community can make a real difference to people's lives. Carál touched on it during her speech, and I am going to come to it in a moment.

Like a number of Members, some of whom spoke today and yesterday, I am relatively new to the Assembly and to our budgetary process. I, like others, am learning from this, and I am contributing to the debate as the Alliance agriculture, environment and rural affairs spokesperson. I will probably touch as well on some of the role that I play as a member of the Policing Board, on which I serve on behalf of this Assembly and my party. I hope as well to address some new approaches to ensuring that Departments work, as referred to a moment ago, in close liaison with communities wherever possible.

The Chair and Deputy Chair of the AERA Committee have already spoken, so I will try to avoid repetition as far as I can, but I will address some of the challenges that the Executive and the Finance Minister face that have been referred to in previous debates. As I said, I will try to keep that brief.

Current challenges, both domestic-political and global-environmental, are forcing an agenda for DAERA and its officials, and us as public representatives, like we have seldom seen in recent times. The Finance Minister and other Ministers will be aware that that brings an expectation of financial provision and political responsibility to properly address issues that are really with us, such as the pressures that EU exit could bring to our vital agri-food sector, family farms and our rural communities. The Department of Finance will, I hope, be prepared for changes in budget requirements as that rolls out and will, I hope, make provision for contingencies in that regard also, because this is an ever-evolving situation and there is still a great degree of uncertainty around the processes involved.

There is also growing awareness, of course, of the climate crisis, which has been referred to in the debate a number of times. There is a growing demand that we react to it with action and not words. It is now realistically expected that environmentalism be embedded at every level of government in planning and delivery and that necessary investment is made to change approach in the apparatus in government and departmental infrastructure, so that our collective carbon emissions are reducing towards, hopefully, elimination. There is the need, as well as the commitment in agreements reached, to have, in Northern Ireland, an environmental protection agency, working to safeguard quality of life and our natural habitat. There will, of course, be provision needed for the necessary transition from current arrangements around the environment to that new agency. There has been mention of an environmental office as well, and I expect that the Minister will have to make provision for transition from the current NIEA arrangements. It is an agency that will, ultimately, deal with issues as important as the air that we breathe and the water that we drink.

Proper and justified tribute has been paid during the debate to the work done by civil servants during the absence of an Assembly, and I wish to fully associate myself with the remarks made and do so genuinely. I have to say, looking at the DAERA budget and accounts in the context of the issues that I have just raised, quite frankly, the fact that some Departments are failing to spend tens of millions of pounds begs some questions. I am not seeking that it be done retrospectively, but, hopefully, in the days, months and years ahead, with a joined-up and collaborative approach at Executive level, we will move forward through the remainder of this mandate ensuring that resources are fully utilised to meet the issues that I, and other Members, have raised.

The New Decade, New Approach agreement contains specific reference to the principles of co-design and co-production, and that brings me to the points that I raised about departmental interaction with communities. Co-design and co-production are a key part of that. I put it to the Minister that there are few areas where this is more ready to go than on environmental and countryside projects and groups that are already working, particularly, though not exclusively, in rural areas. There is, if we pursue this engagement and get it right, an opportunity to harness expertise and commitment in a meaningful, positive and productive way.

I make the suggestion of community linkages not to secure efficiencies or to seek ad hoc casual support, but so that we can share a depth of knowledge that is already there, often linked to local support agencies, such as councils, but all too often not connected to central government in its thinking and delivery. In putting that forward, I refer again to the work that was done, with my experience in DCAL, where that interaction with communities could make real differences to those who are the most vulnerable in our society, such as people suffering from mental health problems and the homeless. It can help with other health projects across the country, for example cancer projects. That is simply one business area of one Department tying in with other government agencies in an interdepartmental fashion to deliver to those most in need of it on the ground.

There is scope to try to extend that across Departments and government. Hopefully, the Minister will indicate

whether his Department can lead in that coordination and cooperation across Departments to build that mutual working arrangement, trust and respect.

4.45 pm

I said at the start that I will touch on policing. I attended a meeting here at lunchtime with Members who are also members of the Policing Board, and we looked at the policing plan for the years ahead. I am sure that the Minister of Finance will be well aware of the demands made there and commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach agreement, where we will have to examine very closely changing crime rates and crime types, crime trends, cybercrime, human trafficking, corporate crime and, of course, the need for adjustments for the outworkings of the policing of Brexit.

It has been said many times over the years that policing cannot be done by the police alone. Without repeating everything that we just said on another issue, that is another clear requirement for more joined-up government, more collaboration, more working with external agencies, and working to extend good projects that are already in place on health triage systems with the police, where first responders work with local policing teams to ensure that those most in stress and most in need are treated with priority when they most need it. It also has the effect of ensuring that we minimise situations where up to a dozen police officers are engaged in A&E departments across one area on a typical weekend night. I am sure that you will agree, Mr Speaker, that that is not a good use of police resources.

What I am really addressing is the readiness to meet those changing demands. I hope that the Finance Minister will refer to that because we are doing so in the context of expectation around the increased visibility of police and a commitment to maximise, where possible, neighbourhood policing.

I hope that those commitments in NDNA can be met and will extend beyond collaborative departmental working to ensure that Departments work as closely as possible with other agencies to ensure safer communities and cleaner, more environmentally friendly communities.

Mr Storey: I am sure that Members will be delighted to know that I am going to make another contribution today and cause all sorts of trouble, but that is not the reason why I come to the Chamber. As the Speaker knows, I try to engage in a way that is meaningful to Members because it is very easy for us to come here and to think that we are not part of the process. We play a vital role not only in the Chamber but in Committees. That needs to be conveyed to our colleagues in the Executive because, on some occasions, what is discussed here fails to be conveyed in a way that we get outcomes when it comes to Executive decisions. Maybe the debates today and yesterday will help to send a message to the Executive that things need to be done differently.

I will comment on what we need to do regarding what I call a "priority financial framework". Yesterday and today, we have had, "We need, we need, we need" and "We have to have". The list goes on. We all have them in our constituencies, and I could give the same list for mine, but in this Budget process and previous processes, I think that the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party referred earlier

to a fiscal council. I call it a priority financial framework. We need a system that reflects the priorities of the people whom we claim to represent. I heard in the House today, yesterday and in previous times, “But the people in my constituency require”, but when it comes to listing those priorities in any opinion poll, what comes out top will be health. Of course, health has the largest percentage of the Budget. What comes out second is education. Those are the beginnings of a priority financial framework. My party, the parties opposite, all the parties here and those who do not have a party all claim to have the most important issue of the day, but if it costs a huge amount, we need to have a serious rethink.

Let me move on to another issue. The Members opposite need to be reminded of it. It is British austerity. That austerity was an awful thing. It was introduced, yet again, by those bad Tories — those bad politicians in London. Who implemented it in Northern Ireland for 10 years? What happened between 2007 and the contrived collapse of the institutions in 2016? There were Sinn Féin Ministers — Ministers of the Crown. If austerity was such an issue, and if it was being imposed on us in such an impossible and terrible way, why did they not bring down the institutions before 2016? They were quite happy to operate the institutions and implement austerity.

Of course, we then had the double standards of those who were in the Executive and not in the Executive. Parties like the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party wanted the luxury of the ministerial portfolio but also the ability to say, “Oh no, we did not make that decision. We were able to vote against that. Our hands are clean. We would never do that”. What happened to a five-party mandatory coalition? It went out the window when it did not suit them. When will we all get real? There are contradictions in my position on many occasions, but at least I have enough honesty as a sinner saved by grace, as mentioned earlier, to admit when there are things that we did not get right and then to try collectively to fix them.

Housing is an issue close to my heart. I want to see the people of Northern Ireland, whether they are in Ballymena or Ballymurphy, Coleraine or Coalisland, Ballymoney or —.

Mr Dunne: Bangor. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Storey: We had better not forget Bangor.

Mr Chambers: North Down.

Mr Storey: North Down.

Mr Dunne: That will do.

Mr Storey: As I said at the Dispatch Box when I was Minister, I want to see the people of Northern Ireland have good quality homes, not just houses. If we transform the housing stock — the 87,000 houses owned by the Housing Executive, those owned by housing associations, those in co-ownership and those in the private-rented sector — but particularly social housing through the stock that is in public ownership, we transform those communities. The Member for North Belfast has good examples from her constituency of quality homes in the private sector, quality homes provided by housing associations and quality Housing Executive stock. The problem is that we are not doing building enough homes. We are not unlocking the potential of the construction industry, which wants to build new houses. I ask Members this, through the Chair, of course: does anyone know when the Housing Executive

last built a new home? It has been years — over 20 years — since the Housing Executive built, because it cannot build houses. We have left it to housing associations. We have left it to others, and the deficit is shocking. I encourage the Minister to ensure that housing is prioritised in any future budgetary process.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. When he talks about housing, he also talks about education and health, because, as has been proven time after time, if young people live in good, affordable accommodation, it helps them greatly and benefits their education and health. Everything is tied up with housing. That is why budgetary processes should not be in silos any more.

Mr Storey: I accept what the Member says. The difficulty is how we translate that into working together collaboratively in a way that enables other Assembly Members and I to tell our constituents that the outcome has delivered for them. The housing that I saw in parts of my constituency, in Ballymena, and in my colleague’s constituency, was shameful. What I saw in West Belfast was shameful. People should not have to live in those conditions. When we change the housing environment, we change the opportunities in health, education, community cohesion and well-being for all our citizens. I urge the Minister and his party to genuinely grasp the issue of a new model for housing in Northern Ireland. Let us not have this — we will use 10 as a simple number — 10 houses for the Prods and 10 houses for the Roman Catholics. That is a shameful way to distribute housing.

The Member referred to discrimination, and that is the reason why the Housing Executive was established. There are some people in the House who seem to forget that discrimination worked against working-class Protestants as well. It seems as though all the ills were done against one community. I had a grandfather who did not own his own property, who did not have a vote, who did not have a conacre and who did not have all those other things. The difference with my grandfather was that he never justified taking up arms or using violent means to try to change the situation. I think that is the difference that some people in the House need to remember.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Will the Member state clearly, then, that he and his party are for objective need when it comes to building houses? In there lies the difficulty that we have had in equality in housing for years.

Mr Storey: I think that the Member will also accept that it is about how we then come to determine what objective need is. The Member for Foyle can wave her hands as though this is not an issue, but this affects her constituency as well, and it is a problem. The issue is how we can have an honest discussion about objective need. I will not stand in the way of meeting the needs of anyone in any part of this country of Northern Ireland, provided that we are doing it in a way that is fair to everybody else.

We see that in how we distribute welfare reform. There was an inherent imbalance. Working families are discriminated against because there are some people who believe that their needs are greater than others. That is not fair; that is not an equitable society. I am of the view that we need a process that deals with objective need, but we need to agree on how we determine what that objective need is and how we are going to agree the process for it.

Let me come to another area on the Budget. I would love to see progress being made in the Department for Communities on Supporting People. Supporting People has been ring-fenced for a number of years, but there has never been an uplift. It has struggled. We see organisations like the Simon Community that really are placed in a very difficult place to deliver in many of our constituencies with a reduced budget but an evergrowing demand for their services. That was something that I, unfortunately, was not able to achieve in my time, and I would love to think that others could collectively achieve an uplift in the resource spend for Supporting People.

The Member for North Belfast also made reference to one of the problems that the system faces with planning. That is an area where we have to draw certain lines. Changes in planning should not allow everybody to build where they want to build at all costs. They need to be brought about in the planning system to allow for quicker and more expeditious planning decisions so that they do not contribute to the problems that we have seen in some of the major projects involving capital expenditure. I see in my constituency the slow burn or slow process for getting decisions made, and that can create difficulties for a variety of reasons, so changes in that would be helpful.

I turn, Mr Speaker, to issues in the Department of Justice.

I am a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. My colleague Mr Blair referred to some of the issues that emanate from policing in Northern Ireland. Again, this falls into the category of understanding some of the challenges. My colleague the Chair of the Justice Committee referred to the challenges earlier. There is a £32 million pressure on pensions, an £11 million one on legacy issues, and a £42 million one on Brexit, injury-while-on-duty and tackling paramilitarism. Coupled with a £54 million funding pressure for the PSNI, those pressures come with a considerably heavy price tag.

5.00 pm

I read the following comment recently in one of the reports from the police to the Policing Board:

“The reality is that the PSNI is at the point where absorbing material financial pressures or budget cuts directly impacts on front-line services, which affects the service’s ability to keep people safe. They continue to erode the service’s ability to prevent harm, protect our communities and detect offences and offenders.”

That is the challenge for us.

That brings me back to the point about having a priority financial framework. Surely policing is a priority for us all. When we are in need, it is one of the first organisations that we will have recourse to, but the demand placed on the police to become ever more efficient and to be able to do more of what is required of them increases daily.

Some Members have a particular interest in tackling domestic violence. They have been advocates for the changes that are needed to address the issue. Sadly, domestic violence is an ever-increasing problem in our society, and the police need to be given all the resources possible to address it and many other issues.

I will conclude by raising a number of other issues. The Chief Constable has already made a request for funding

for 600 new full-time officers. It is vital that the merits of that business case be recognised. Similarly, it is unacceptable that some of Northern Ireland’s most skilled and experienced detectives — those who are seen as global leaders in counterterrorism — are housed in some 180 Portakabins throughout the police estate. The Chief Constable has a particular concern, because it is not all about the individual. It is also about the environment in which the individual operates. It begs the question of what message is being sent to those interested in a career in policing. We have heard a lot of debate in recent days on its importance. I trust that it is a matter that will still be of importance to Members.

The Gillen review report has made clear recommendations to the Department of Justice, the PSNI, the Public Prosecution Service, the Courts and Tribunals Service and other agencies about the need for transformation. If there is one report that the House needs to take seriously, it is that. We need to find all the resource at our disposal to ensure that its recommendations are implemented and that those who are exposed to the most vile and horrendous forms of abuse are given every possible protection.

A lot of what I raised requires cross-departmental help and assistance. No one Minister can address all the concerns. Some of us are sceptical as to whether the Assembly will survive and wonder when we will have the next contrived problem that allows people to walk out the door.

If there is a genuine willingness to make these institutions work, they will work only when we have in place the proper financial framework that recognises that we cannot do it all. We cannot continue going to Whitehall with a begging bowl and looking for more. We genuinely need to trim our sails in certain ways that will mean we get the best possible outcome for the people whom we claim we are here to represent.

Mr Catney: I am glad to be in the Chamber discussing issues that matter to our people — all our people — collectively. It took me more than 1,000 days to get the chance to make my maiden speech, so I warmly welcome the fact that we are finally here making decisions and standing up for people.

I want us to try to focus on the present; I do not want to look back. We have a past and we have a future. Instead of using one eye for looking back and one eye for looking forward, let us use both our eyes for the here and now and make where we live better. This is my home; I want it to be better. Every day of my life, I tried, as a self-employed man, to give employment for Northern Ireland and make it a better place that we can all live in and share.

As Members have clearly articulated, our public services and public servants are under intolerable pressure. They are at breaking point, and, in many cases, they are already broken. The pressures facing health, education, housing and our welfare system have reached crisis point. We must do better and deliver for our people across our community. I use that very strong word “community” because I do not see two; I see only one. I see us all together on this. If we want to build this, we have to do it together. If you are lifting a heavy load and we share that heavy load, it surely makes the weight much lighter.

We have been failed by stalemate and stagnation for far too long. The pressure on our public services is felt acutely in my own constituency of Lagan Valley, where our schools

are at breaking point, people are waiting too long for medical appointments, and young families are struggling to get their first decent job or homes of their own. This Budget, and everything we do in the Chamber, needs to be about unlocking the potential of our people right across our community. We have a wealth of talent across Northern Ireland, with some of the most creative and courageous people in our midst. We must create an atmosphere in which they can thrive and are not forced abroad for decent jobs. I myself have had to go out to two girls; they went to China. It is a big loss in families when they go. I have one living in Munich now, and even that is a loss. Now, you are not just saying goodbye to your children; you are saying goodbye to their husbands and your children's children.

I want to briefly add some thoughts as the SDLP business and innovation spokesman. As a former businessman, as I said earlier, I understand the issues that our businesses, particularly our SMEs, face and the complexities of issues that are at hand. I am sorry to keep going on about unfair rates, but I genuinely believe that they are unfair. If we want to try to grow our tourism industry, we need to look at those who are at the coalface and trying to grow it. I have spoken to the Minister, and I hope that he tries to take that on board or tries to unleash that potential or address the fear that is there. The SDLP will work to ensure that our entrepreneurs are not priced off the local high street by unfair rates.

Businesses require certainty in order to thrive. As SDLP business and enterprise spokesman, I want to use my experience to help shape an agenda that ensures businesses have some degree of certainty — an agenda that creates an environment that lets our entrepreneurs pursue their hopes for their businesses and for their communities. For too long, there has been a lack of both central and local government support for those trying to create jobs. The SDLP will endeavour to help SMEs get the level of support that they need from government to thrive, with expert advice and guidance, and to ensure that they get paid on time and in full for the services and products that they provide to local government.

We must have our eyes wide open to the scale of the challenges ahead. Delivering a strong, regionally balanced economy that works for everyone, with high-quality public services, will not be easy. However, I believe that, with some political will and a lot of hard work, we can get together to deliver better for everyone.

Mr Speaker, I wish to personally thank you and all the Members of the House for your kind words on the death of my mother and on the death of my nephew; it meant a lot to us. I just want to put on record my thanks to all who visited me or came up to me on the Floor or around the Building and to you, Mr Speaker, for your kind words. Thank you all.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Mr Catney.

Mr Robinson: My contribution is mainly based on the budget problems in my constituency. Minister, while every constituency has many budgetary needs, I believe that my constituency of East Londonderry sometimes tends to be overlooked. East Londonderry has a large tourist element to its economy, so easy and safe travel is essential throughout all parts of the constituency. Minister Mallon has made it clear that she needs more finances to tackle the infrastructure problems. Those include the Ballykelly

bypass in my constituency, which is long overdue, and the Gortcorbies climbing lane between Limavady and Coleraine, which you are well aware of, Minister, and for which I have lobbied for many years.

In all the years that I have been an elected representative, I have never known our street lighting to be in such a dire state. Somewhere in the region of 12,000 to 14,000 street lights are out throughout Northern Ireland. In my home town of Limavady, we will soon need torches and candles to get around. Infrastructure certainly needs finance to address those health and safety issues.

On education, numerous schools need long-overdue repairs carried out to ageing buildings, so the Education Minister needs resources to progress those projects. One project in my constituency is a school that has never had a gym, and it has been raising that issue for a decade. Our education system is our children's future, and we must try to give our young people the best opportunities for the rest of their life.

Magilligan prison in my constituency has long been promised a rebuild, and the former Justice Minister Claire Sugden knows how long I have lobbied for that project to become a reality. Again, it is long overdue.

I also want to highlight the many difficulties that surround the provision of housing, to which Mr Storey alluded recently. In my constituency, we have hundreds of people on waiting lists who require homes, but no homes are being built to address the chronic waiting lists in my constituency. We also have problems with repairs and adaptations to Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties. I will be meeting your colleague in a few weeks to discuss those urgent issues.

Minister, all we need is for you to acquire the necessary finances to cure many of our ills. I appreciate that that is a near-impossible task, but I urge you, where possible, to make the level of budget available to all Ministers to address the issues that I mentioned, in an attempt to begin addressing the very real needs in Northern Ireland and, in particular, in my constituency.

5.15 pm

Mr Chambers: It is one thing to have a wish list of perceived must-have projects and services but entirely another matter to find the budget to deliver them. Part 1 of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document majored on the challenging issues facing our health service. Those challenges are not just faced by patients on a long waiting list for treatment but involve the mental and physical health of our dedicated NHS staff, at all levels, who struggle daily to cope with working conditions that are overcome only because of their loyalty, dedication and willingness to go the extra mile and work the extra unpaid hours to provide compassionate patient care. It is easy to forget that they work in a high-pressure, life-and-death environment. The dependency on their goodwill is not sustainable and neither can it be justified.

The 'New Decade' document has been widely quoted as being fully supported by the five main parties in the House. The Ulster Unionist Party does not support many parts of the document. Our well-documented concerns are around issues such as legacy and Irish language legislation, which is in no way softened by money being spent on Ulster Scots.

I sat in a room in Stormont House alongside party colleagues on a Thursday evening in January, having been called in at short notice, reading a copy of the document as the Secretary of State appeared outside announcing it to the media. That was hardly a satisfactory way to bring people on board. The NIO official in the room even tried to take the partially read copies from us just prior to the press conference commencing outside.

Our subsequent decision to take a Ministry was not an indication, nor should it be considered as such, of support for all that is contained in the document. It was however, a commitment to work for the well-being of our population. The Ministry taken by my party colleague, Robin Swann, was considered to be the most challenging and difficult portfolio to claim. It is significant that, despite its importance, others who could have taken it were happy to bypass it during the selection process.

The Health Ministry wish list was not written by Robin Swann, but, rather, it represents the health priorities of the DUP and Sinn Féin, who were the main authors of the 'New Decade' document. Minister Swann will now endeavour to deliver all the elements of the wish list.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank Mr Chambers for giving way. His contribution is enlightening in many ways. Is he telling us that, during the three years of on/off negotiations between the parties, the NIO and the British and Irish Governments, the Ulster Unionist Party never once raised the issue of health or asked for that to be funded? That is what I am taking from his words today: that, over that period, health was never mentioned by the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr Chambers: Well, certainly, my understanding is that we had plenty to say, but we did not see very much of it in the document when it was produced.

Anyway, Minister Swann will now endeavour to deliver all the elements of the wish list, and there have been promising noises of full support from around the House to help him to deliver the targets that were set in the 'New Decade' document. The Minister has been frank and honest about what he needs to meet the targets. He has already settled long-standing wages issues in the health service that, in themselves, presented huge and immediate challenges. I acknowledge that that was achieved with cooperation from the Minister's Executive colleagues. If we are to transform our health service and reduce or, indeed, eliminate unacceptable waiting lists, that attitude of common purpose must continue.

The Bengoa report will challenge us all. Are we prepared to accept the re-profiling or downgrading of our local hospital? Will we demonstrate the leadership that is required to transform healthcare to make it sustainable going forward, or will we all retreat to our silos? Minister Swann has said that he needs £492 million to stand still. That includes £170 million to meet the pay parity that has already been agreed. He requires an additional £169 million to meet points in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. Will we find all this money delivered in our new Budget, or are we happy just to talk the talk? Are we prepared to just shrug our shoulders and tut-tut about lengthy accident and emergency waits for treatment for our citizens, with perhaps family members lying for hours, running into days in some cases, on trolleys parked in busy corridors?

While our health and social care staff have worked tirelessly over the past year, the frustrating reality is that for nine months — indeed, for many months before — our health service was largely leaderless. There was no clearer indication of that than the unprecedented decision of our nurses to go on strike. Had the Assembly not been mothballed for three years, relationships would likely never have been allowed to deteriorate to such poor levels.

Despite that absence of political accountability, our health service continued to function but with ever-increasing pressures. We are now at a stage where simply managing decline should not be the preferred outcome. As the Health Minister has repeatedly said over recent weeks, the ability to start cutting the shameful waiting lists will depend heavily on the budget received by his Department next month.

We need to be much more ambitious than just managing decline. We need to start moving people off waiting lists but to do that will require money. To get to a more sustainable position, we will need sustained additional investment over future years to deal with backlogs. While the Vote on Account is crucial to keep the service ticking along until the Main Estimates later in the year, our health service — or, indeed, the health of our citizens — does not have the luxury of time. Key spending decisions need to be taken and taken now. It cannot afford to wait until later in the year. That is why I hope that the Executive and the House will continue to collectively support the Minister in taking decisions immediately for the next year.

I pose this question: are we serious about health reform? Imminent and current Budget decisions will give an indication of whether the House is content merely to play with words around the health of our citizens or whether we are truly sincere about putting our money where our mouth is and bringing about meaningful transformation of what is still the best and most professional "free at the point of delivery" health service in the world.

Ms Armstrong: We are back just a matter of weeks, and although we are settling into the Assembly processes, that does not mean that we should ignore the necessity to ask questions and demand better. As confirmed by my colleague Andrew Muir, we need to hear more from the Finance Minister about how the Budget process is going to change. We cannot continue as if nothing has happened. There are considerable lessons that we have to learn about how we spend public money, and there has to be a difference between Budget by occasional reallocation in the hope of covering existing services on the one hand and a carefully considered and planned Budget that really transforms society on the other.

We need to be absolutely clear at this point. We do not know what extra money may come forward, but we do know the cost of continuing to deliver services through systems that are yet to be transformed.

The Minister stated yesterday, at his press conference held during Question Time, that we are £600 million short of what Ministers define that they need. It is unclear exactly what has been and will be sought by the Finance Minister from the Treasury in London, whether any revenue-raising measures have been seriously considered, or whether there will be serious changes to ensure that we save money, not least on the cost of division.

If we are to accomplish everything in New Decade, New Approach, we are entitled to ask the Finance Minister:

where are the practical proposals to enable us to fund all of it? Ultimately, I have considerable sympathy with Paul Frew and my Strangford colleague Mike Nesbitt's comments that we cannot contemplate significant revenue raising until we have made all the savings that we can. This means ensuring not only that we stop handing money back to the Treasury at the end of the financial year but that all Ministers ensure that their Department and arm's-length bodies are operating as efficiently as possible; that we move forward the reform of public services, not least in health and education; and that, at last, we take proactive measures to seriously tackle division and end the duplication of expenditure by providing services on a one-for-you-and-one-for-me basis.

The Executive Office's share of the overall devolved Budget is very small, yet it alone shoulders some of the challenges ahead. For example, the cost of long overdue compensation to victims of the Troubles and to victims of historical institutional abuse will run to over £0.5 billion. Managing this must be an urgent priority for us all, given that victims have already been further victimised by political gridlock. This raises the obvious question of where the money is coming from.

The cost of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots/Ulster-British commissioners will apparently run to nearly £29 million, almost three times the total cost of the current cross-border bodies. Where does this figure come from? Does it represent the most efficient method of delivery on the requirements outlined in 'New Decade, New Approach'?

We have also heard about another social investment fund. We have concerns about how the last social investment fund was run, not least the fact that money ended up with groups that were represented on steering committees. Any future fund must be dependent on clearer value for money and avoid obvious clashes of interest. It is a basic principle of public funding that allocations must be made on the basis of the evidence. In other words, they must be fair and they must be perceived to be fair.

In those three cases, do we know whether money will be allocated from London or Belfast, how the total budget has been worked out and whether spending really represents good value for money? That is before we come to the earlier question about how we make serious savings and whether we need to contemplate revenue raising. It is time for an open and honest discussion. Our overall plan cannot be just to rely on monitoring rounds and some shuffling at the end of the financial year. Just doing things the way that we have always done them and hoping to paper over the cracks as we approach the end of March is exactly what has left us with a transport system that cannot continue to provide public transport; a Housing Executive that is threatening to divest itself of 43,000 homes; a segregated school system that cannot afford to pay teachers and our children being taught in dilapidated buildings; a sewerage system that is at capacity, meaning that areas in my constituency —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Ms Armstrong: Yes, certainly.

Mr Stalford: Does the Member agree that our ultimate vision should be a single education system for all of Northern Ireland that encompasses the myriad identities, cultures and difference here rather than continuing with

five separate education sectors, some of which are more favoured than others?

Ms Armstrong: I could not agree more. It is about time that all our children were educated together under one roof. After all, it is about education. It is not about what adults want. I am glad to see you coming over to the integrated education side, Christopher.

Mr Stalford: Ah, but that is one of the favoured sectors.

Ms Armstrong: Love it.

As I was saying, our sewerage system is at capacity, meaning that areas in my constituency and in many of your constituencies are being refused any development and that there is a stay on building much-needed homes. We have a health system with vast and intolerable waiting times. I have hearing problems, and I waited on lists for 85 weeks to have a first hearing test. That is the type of simple thing that makes a difference to people's lives. I got hearing aids, and they have changed my life, but waiting for 85 weeks? Honestly.

We have warned for decades that without proper reform and changing the way that we think and do things, this would be the outcome. It is taking far too long to deliver the transformation that this society needs. It is time to get serious about the need to do things more efficiently, not least by embracing reform, tackling division and ensuring that public money is spent accountably and transparently. There is a challenge to the whole Executive. Are you spending our money efficiently? Are you procuring the right services that will take us forward into this new decade? Will there be a new approach? We are about to find out whether we are really serious about making meaningful changes to how we do things in this place and, ultimately, to the society that we are here to represent. We need a bit of a spring rebirth in this place: a lot less of the silo mentality and a lot more working together.

5.30 pm

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Stalford] in the Chair)

The cross-departmental Programme for Government has the opportunity to see budgets shared to deliver real change in a shared society. Minister, if you can get us more money from London, that will be very welcome and we will spend it. Minister, I also ask you to ensure that the hard discussions now take place on how our Budget will deliver a sustainable, shared and inclusive society where, instead of investing in the total cost of segregation and division projects, we create an effective, economic and societal path towards our new decade.

Ms S Bradley: Like the Member who spoke previously, I was waiting and not expecting to be called in this order, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

I rise as the SDLP spokesperson for health, and, like others, I put on record my concern that the Committee did not really have much time to scrutinise the Budget at the level that should be expected during this process. The high-level overview briefing supplied to us by the Department of Health provided indications on the pressures that the Department faces. At the outset and in the absence of the desired level of scrutiny, I seek an assurance from the Minister of Finance that sufficient flexibility and contingency funding exists in the Budget

and that consideration has been given to ensuring that swift access to funding could be drawn down by the Department of Health and others to manage the ongoing and ever-changing assessment of the threat posed by the coronavirus.

Fiscal authority, council and frameworks — many names are given — all have been rightly aired today, and we look forward to seeing how we can build an effective and efficient budgetary process going forward, but there is an immediate onus on all of us. We need to recognise what leverage is within our gift. We need to embrace the responsibilities that rest upon us all to plan for this place better. Being here is a late but good start, and so, for now, we can mostly make only retrospective commentary on the Bill. But remember this: bad Budgets cost lives. That is not just evidenced in the health budget, but across Departments such as Infrastructure, where we are reliant on a safe network of roads.

In this maze of navigating the aftermath of a broken Government and the backward-looking budgetary system, there is a real danger that we could lose focus of our ultimate destination, which is to make life better for everybody outside the House. Like many Members, I cannot help but see today's business in the context of prioritising what goes forward. I no longer want to have parents, carers, children and adults with autism to have to fight for every service they need or to have any vulnerable person to have to add to their misfortunes by finding the fight in them to present their case to get the services that they need. This is a real opportunity for us to share views on how to effect change via expenditure to reach those front-line services.

The SDLP very much wanted to see a junior Minister for mental health, and I appreciate that that has moved into a working group. I have concerns that, looking through the budgetary process, it is really difficult to follow through and see what level of expenditure is being issued across Departments on this, sadly, ever-increasing problem in society. We need to make sure that somebody somewhere is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of our expenditure and resource that is directed towards mental health.

We also need to obtain, as the Minister, rightly, said at the outset, a fair wage for our health workers. We reached out to nurses, and I welcome that, but that is only a section of our Health and Social Care. I welcome that the Department briefed us on its early efforts to reduce waiting lists and times and to engage with the transformation agenda, but let us be clear about this: plans to proceed with any budgeted transition without directly addressing pressures that exist on such front-line services are set for inefficiencies if not failure.

Any proposal is only as strong as its weakest link, and Community Pharmacy has articulated strongly that its contribution is beyond compromised; it is broken. Last night, it reluctantly arrived at a consensus to take industrial action on contractual and patient safety issues. Morale in the sector is reportedly at an all-time low. The social value of community pharmacies across our communities should never be underestimated or undervalued. Not only do their professionals safely dispense medicines and treatment but they take significant pressures off our GP services by providing critical front-line services. They add richly to our social fabric by making up for the increasing lack of human

contact that sadly exists across our society. They speak to the loneliness agenda, something that we have been late in picking up on. I welcome the Minister of Health's commitment to engage with Community Pharmacy, as articulated earlier in the House, ahead of any such industrial action being required.

The issue of budgeting in this place is, without doubt, a challenge. Of course, we have to address the immediate pressures that are flagged up across Departments and ensure the safe delivery of public services, but we need to find room to make this part of Ireland a choice venue to do business. We need to find ambition. Our revenue-raising options are relatively limited and too often ask for additional contributions from individuals and businesses that already make generous contributions to our public purse. Our Budgets of the past have created a working poor. We lean heavily on individuals and small businesses that simply have no margin for making further financial contributions.

I am a Member for South Down, and our dependency on small local traders and the agriculture and fishing industries is well understood. What is less acknowledged is the untapped potential that exists in South Down to increase our tourism offering. Strategic investment in key economic driver projects such as the Narrow Water bridge has the potential to draw on a tourism footfall that we see within eyeshot across the lough in Carlingford. Such projects give us the opportunity to build on who contributes to our public purse. We must understand constituency profiles and the room for real growth. That may vary from area to area, but, as the home of the Mourne mountains, the South Down potential is clear.

In an effort to see real savings and the rationalisation of services, so that we do not duplicate services across Departments, I urge one thing: we remain mindful of rural areas that do not have ease of access to public services. As we take forward any proposals, we must use that benchmark at all times.

Mr Lynch: You will be happy to learn that I will be brief, and I will refer to the Budget maybe once or twice.

For the past hour, I have been listening to the debate in the Chamber. All Members have talked about pressures, how the Budget is a challenge, how schools are under pressure and how there is a lack of funding. All of those statements are true. For any Minister to deliver a Budget in the North of Ireland is difficult, but it is much more difficult, as, I think, Matthew said, after 10 years of austerity. As many Members across the Chamber have said over the past couple of days, that has had a major impact on our public services. Tory cuts to the block grant and that party's austerity policies are the direct cause of what our —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lynch: — schools, roads, health system and many other public services are now experiencing. I am happy to give way.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member recognise that there was a world economic decline in 2008? Less money was available to all Governments, except, of course, in Venezuela, which went bust. Does he recognise that it is important that Governments act prudently to protect the long-term interests of the public?

Mr Lynch: I thank the Member for his intervention. When the Tories came to power in, I think, 2011, they cut — it was a policy — £1 billion off the block grant. That was the reality that we found ourselves in. We cannot deny that.

I will speak as my party's spokesperson on transport. At a time when we should be encouraging people to use all types of public transport throughout the system, making public transport services more affordable and investing in sustainable transport, our public transport network is fighting tooth and nail to maintain its current services. That is one of the best examples of the failure of austerity. Since 2015-16, Translink has been depending on its reserves to maintain its services. Over the past number of years, community transport funding has been cut by over 37%. That is a valuable service that addresses social isolation and provides equal access to services. In my constituency, community transport is a vital service for rural dwellers. It is clear that we have been facing funding cuts year in, year out to services that are vital to the people of the North. All of that is a direct by-product of British financial policy. The fact that austerity puts most services at risk shows a disregard for the most vulnerable in our society.

With the Tories in power for probably the foreseeable future, there will be an absence of public funding growth, and we will be further disadvantaged. The British Government have a responsibility to provide sufficient funding for public services, but I do not believe that Governments in London will ever have the interest of citizens in this part of Ireland in their thinking. There were audible gasps from the opposite Benches yesterday when my colleague Martina Anderson mentioned the benefits of Irish unity. We should initiate an informed debate on the economic merits of an all-Ireland and end the dependency on a diminishing block grant. I wish the Minister well in seeking funding for the meantime when he goes over to London.

Mr Beggs: In commenting on the Budget Bill, I too express my concern at the current Budget process. The Budget Bill is one of the key legislative approvals for the expenditure of our public funds. During the past three years, Ministers have not been in place to manage consultation on the various budgets and how public money has been spent in Northern Ireland. We also need to recognise that, during the past decade, even when Ministers were in place, there has been inadequate consultation and meaningful engagement with the public so that government expenditure represents public priorities rather than any individual political party's priority.

The Budget Bill regularises public expenditure for 2019-2020 and authorises 45% of that expenditure to be given to each Department until a detailed breakdown of expenditure of the 2020-21 Budget is approved later in the year. Given that legislative authorisation to fund public bodies and pay staff must be in place before the beginning of April, we have little choice but to approve the Bill, despite recognising that there are many flaws in the process. The public should have been engaged in the detailed outworking of the Budget. What, actually, do some of the high-level figures represent? I highlight to Members that, when I first came to the Assembly, the Budget processes did not start in January or February, because that is the last time that a Budget could be approved here. A Bill would literally have been presented in January or February — very, very late on — but the public would have been engaged from October onwards.

That is what has happened in Scotland and other devolved regions. There would then be a couple of months of real engagement with the public, and the public would have a better understanding of what the Budget meant. Then, the public could lobby all politicians so that their priorities would be recognised rather than those of political parties or politicians.

5.45 pm

I draw the Minister's attention to a report of the Finance and Personnel Committee dated 18 January 2012, which said that there was:

"a lack of transparency and read-across between the Budgets, Estimates and Accounts, which has caused frustration for Assembly Members and committees. The Committee has long called for a settled and effective budget process which affords sufficient time for meaningful engagement with Assembly Members, committees and the wider public."

In that paper, the Committee set out 15 initial recommendations for discussion related to key issues and concerns. The Minister was Chair of that Committee, and it is sad that, since then, Ministers have not, as far as I am aware, addressed the concerns that were raised.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

It is important that there is a healthy Budget process. It is important for democracy that the community is engaged in the Budget process. One of the most meaningful decisions that any Assembly makes is how its money will be spent and how it will be raised. It is vital that there is proper and detailed engagement with the public. From discussions that I had prior to the return of devolution, I understood that the Department of Finance had developed an online tool — some sort of app — that would make it possible to more meaningfully engage the public. From having spoken to contacts, I was expecting that to be initiated prior to Christmas, but we have not heard anything. The public has not been engaged in this issue, but I hope that, in the future, it will be.

It is important that, when we discuss the Vote on Account and the Budget Bill, we plan carefully. Several Members have talked about austerity — it was mentioned by the previous Member — and the size of the Northern Ireland block grant. We all wish we had greater funds and flexibility, but we cannot live in dreamland. We can lobby for our funds, but, ultimately, the Government decide, and we are given provision to determine how to spend, as are all the other devolved regions. We also have some limited choices as to how we can raise funds locally. There has to be responsible government here and recognition of a pressure not just to spend money but to spend money wisely.

Mr O'Toole: I thank the Member very much for giving way. Reflecting on his previous remark, he seems to be somewhat resigned to the idea that Northern Ireland will just get a lump of money from London in perpetuity and lump it and that the idea of raising its own revenue or thinking differently about prioritising is dreamland. Is that the position: that we should just forget about raising our own revenue or thinking differently about how we raise or spend money?

Mr Beggs: The converse is the truth. I am just highlighting that the Assembly has never really looked at other fresh

ways of managing our public expenditure or how our public bodies might be entitled to raise money. Housing is an obvious example. At present, the Housing Executive is almost treated as a public body within the Department; it is funded from the public purse and is limited in what it can spend. The housing associations that are dependent on public funds have also been included in public expenditure; in other words, that limits what they can do, and there is a need to create greater freedom for those organisations. For instance, they might become entitled to the financial transaction funds, which were recently returned to the Treasury, rather than the people of Northern Ireland benefiting from them. The insistence in the past that they would operate as they were, almost within the Department and entirely reliant on public funds and with restrictions, has limited what is available.

We need to think of fresh ways of maximising how capital can be attracted, so that we improve our housing stock going forward, and it is not about selling off Housing Executive houses to the private sector. What about the idea of creating a mutual organisation, letting tenants, through housing associations, run their areas by being able to draw in additional funds and improve the housing stock? Again, there are limited funds available to the Executive and to each Minister, and the choices that they make in spending money elsewhere mean that money is not available for housing, because it is all under the limited capital funds that come to the Executive. We have to free up what is possible to draw in additional resources.

I will now concentrate my remarks on the Department for Infrastructure, the Committee for which I serve on, and will highlight three key areas that need urgent attention. Northern Ireland Water needs urgent investment. First, there is a real pressure on its resource funding — the annual expenditure — of some £7 million. That is largely a result of the rates revaluation process that the Finance Department recently completed. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland Water is a Go-co and has to follow public-sector requirements to an extent, but it also has to follow company law and cannot run for ever at a loss. That is a pressure, but of even more concern to me with Northern Ireland Water is the urgent need for many hundreds of millions of pounds to invest in capital infrastructure. Again, it does not appear that the funding coming from the normal sources through the Exchequer will allow all that is needed to be done here to be completed. At present, there are some 100 areas of Northern Ireland where new planning approvals are not being made because of inadequate sewerage infrastructure. In particular, the Larne water treatment works servicing the town of Larne and that immediate catchment area has been committed to its capacity, and new developments are being held back. That stops new homes being built and even stops businesses expanding. If there is an additional sewerage requirement, those businesses cannot expand unless they undertake significant individual treatment works for their premises, which is just not viable. That is also happening in 100 other locations in Northern Ireland. It is widespread, and it affects our economy. It is not good enough to say that we have a problem: what I want to hear from the Finance Minister is the options for a solution. That is what we need to hear. There is no point saying for ever and a day, “No, no, no”. There are choices to be made, and I want to hear what he sees as the solution, because the capital has to be found so that the local economy is not held back.

I turn to transport infrastructure, particularly the road maintenance budget, which, I understand, is in the order of £75 million. That is approximately half of that which is recommended to maintain our road infrastructure in an efficient manner. When you underinvest in road maintenance, road surfaces decline everywhere and potholes develop. That results in Roads Service having to carry out expensive, unplanned emergency pothole repairs. Workers travel to a specific site and carry out a small piece of work. The Ballyvernstown Road, which is a short distance from my home, has been in poor condition for about 10 years. It is a main route through the area and quite a busy road. In three different years, contractors have resurfaced part of the road. That has involved travel time and bringing all their equipment to the Ballyvernstown Road on three different occasions, and there is still a section that is in very poor condition. The surface is poor and disintegrating, and I suspect that the contractors will be back again next year. That is, at least, better than purely addressing potholes, but it is not a good way to deliver road maintenance. It is much better if they simply tarmac the road as it was needed in the first place.

I mentioned potholes. I understand that, between 2016 and 2019, some £1.7 million was spent on compensation to motorists. That is for motorists who can prove that potholes that were not fixed promptly damaged their car. There will be many other motorists who have damaged their car but may not have applied for compensation as they may not have been able to prove that the potholes were specifically responsible for the damage to their car. As a result of the poor surface on Browns Bay Road in my constituency, 115 cars have been damaged and compensation claimed, which is a remarkable number.

Over the past number of years, road maintenance has relied on in-year monitoring. It is good that additional moneys can go towards road maintenance through in-year monitoring, but it would be much better if it came in a planned process throughout the year, which would reduce the pressure on contractors. Recently, there have been almost daily announcements of road surfacing schemes, and some of the recent money that has been released is being spent.

We also have to recognise that the middle of winter is not the best time to tarmac surfaces. You do not get best value for money, and you get no length of time out of that new surface. It is difficult to get tarmac to last a long time if it is put down in wet and icy conditions. Icy conditions are probably a no-no, but, even in wet conditions, while I am sure that there are additives that improve the outcomes, it would be much better if it were done at warmer times of the year.

Contractors could employ their staff throughout the year. How do you suddenly put together a contract team in January when money has been released? That is very difficult. It is challenging, and contractors may have difficulty in putting those teams together at the last minute. There may not be the same level of competition. I suspect that it would be much more efficient to plan for the long term over a longer period and where there is no pressure or rush.

In recent Committee meetings, departmental officials have highlighted that the Executive have their flagship programmes. Essentially, we were advised that the capital fund has to be used for the flagship programmes, and

then we will see what is left after that for other things. We need to reassess what we do with flagship programmes, especially when we do not have money to maintain the finished surfaces that we generate. We are out of kilter. More and more money is spent on flagship programmes, and inadequate funds have been spent on maintenance.

6.00 pm

I also want to raise a particular issue about the A5 with the Minister. In 2007, we were told that it would cost £650 million. The Republic of Ireland's Government had committed £400 million, so it was to cost the Northern Ireland Executive £250 million. I understand that the latest estimate for the A5, as of December 2019, is £1,139 million. However, only £75 million will come from the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, it will not cost the Executive £250 million; it will cost the Executive £1,059 million. That is over four times the original cost, and it is to come from our limited capital funds.

We have to bear in mind that the A5 is an important route that goes not only to Omagh and Londonderry, but to Donegal. It is for that reason that the Republic of Ireland's Government initially came forward with their generous offer to try to encourage its completion. However, if we commit all capital funds to this road, we will need to be very careful. I ask the Minister to undertake to engage with the Government of the Irish Republic when, eventually, they are in place, whether that be before or after another election, and require them, some of whom may be his colleagues — who knows? — to pay up that which they originally promised. The road will benefit the people of Donegal.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, on a map of Ireland — specifically, the North — there is a clear black spot with regard to infrastructure? There has been a clear deficit, lack of investment and abandonment by the House for a long, long time. That has to be resolved. Building the A5 is a key step in doing that. That road is very dangerous. Since 2006, some 34 people have died on it — 34; 15 of those died in the last four years. The House needs to recognise the importance of that. I hope that the Member does as well.

Mr Beggs: I recognise the importance of investment in new roads throughout Northern Ireland. I have no difficulty acknowledging that hundreds of millions of pounds need to be spent to upgrade the A5. The point that I am making is this: can we afford the £1,059 million for it? If we are to commit that, over what period will we commit it? What sections should be prioritised? Have we reassessed it, given that it will now cost four times the amount that was originally committed? Does the original business case for a brand new dual carriageway the whole way still follow? Should the road be dualled and flyovers built over parts of the existing route? Is it really wise that the proposal is to bypass the new multimillion-pound roundabout at the end of the M1 at Ballygawley and build another one?

Mr McCrossan: We are talking about bypasses, and the Member will find that the north-west — the west, in particular — has been bypassed by this place for a long time. I want the Member to acknowledge that the reason for the exceedingly high cost of the A5 is a minority group known as the Alternative A5 Alliance. It has spent the past number of years derailing the project for its own self-interest. That has cost lives, and it has cost a huge

amount to the taxpayer. Ultimately, it has led to significant increases in the cost of a vital infrastructure project that would develop the entire island.

Mr Beggs: I hope that the Member, and indeed others, support the idea that I have floated, which is that we should go back to the Republic of Ireland's Government to get the £400 million. If we do not, there may not be any money for a road safety scheme elsewhere in your constituency. Whenever maintenance is needed to re-tar a large section of another road, guess what? There may not be any money for it. I am saying that there needs to be balance. We need to look carefully at what is being planned and go back to the promises that were made and see that they are delivered so that the rest of the roads in Northern Ireland can be protected.

Road safety schemes throughout Northern Ireland need to continue to be provided, because you will find that, elsewhere, when all the money is in one area, road safety schemes have no budget. I am aware, for instance, that there were delays in introducing a 20 mph road-calming scheme with variable speeds during school time on the main A2 in my constituency. Other schools still face 40 mph speed limits outside their front door because there is no money to invest in variable message signs to reduce traffic when kids are going to and coming out of school.

We need to get balance in what we are doing. As I said, I have clearly indicated my support for hundreds of millions of pounds being spent. We need to be careful how we spend our money, and it is right to question how we spend our money. There is no point in just writing blank cheques. Circumstances have changed here, as I indicated, so what this Assembly originally committed £250 million to, it is now committing over £1 billion to. At the very least, we need to look at the time frame of how the money will be spent, if not at whether there needs to be an adjustment to what is being proposed.

When I indicated that we need to look carefully at how our money was being spent, that applies to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, as well. I have been interested to find no reference to the Boris bridge in the briefing that I and my colleagues in the Infrastructure Committee had. Maybe it is not even going to land in Northern Ireland. I would have thought that, if it is going to land in Northern Ireland, it would get some reference at least in the Department. I fear that the Boris bridge to Scotland is an expensive design distraction.

Mr Muir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Certainly.

Mr Muir: I welcome the Member's comments. Will he reflect and comment on the fact that his colleagues in Ards and North Down Borough Council voted contrary to that and voted in favour of the bridge?

Mr Beggs: I will make it clear that my view is that it is a distraction from Boris's border down the Irish Sea, which he created in the Brexit process. Millions of pounds of UK taxpayers' funding will be required to take this design process forward, yet the Department for Infrastructure has not even been engaged. There is no reference to it in the documents that we have seen to date as a Committee. Why do I describe it as a distraction? Look at the Channel Tunnel, which cost billions of pounds. It has considerably higher levels of traffic flow than any road, bridge or tunnel

across the North Channel would have. Several companies were involved in its development, but guess what? They went bust even with that greater flow of traffic and revenue capability.

Secondly, there is the small issue of Beaufort's Dyke. For those of you who are not aware of it, it is an 800 feet deep channel that causes major difficulties for bridge or tunnel building. I am not even sure if it is technically feasible to tunnel under it. On top of that, of course, there are the millions of tons of munitions that were dumped there, particularly after the Second World War. Weapons that were deemed to be out of date were just dumped there. That will cause a major structural problem for anybody who tries to do anything in that area.

I have also been fascinated with the images that someone has already been paid to develop to sell this idea. I saw that it was being proposed that the bridge would have two different railway lines, as well as road transport. I thought, wonderful idea. The slight problem is, of course, that there is a different railway gauge in Northern Ireland to that in Scotland. Another slight problem is that really, if you are going to invest lots of money —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to consider the fact that the Boris bridge has not featured since the Minister spoke at the outset. In a way, the Member is straying from the core Budget discussion. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Beggs: I will bring my comments back, Mr Speaker, to the debate. What we are approving is 45% of this year's funds for the Department for Infrastructure so that that Department and its Minister can spend until further detailed discussion occurs. I hope that no money is directed from that 45% towards the Boris bridge, because I would view that as wasteful. I hope that I have connected the two, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: You are doing rightly, but do not try my patience.

Mr Beggs: Public funds should not be used to create political distractions or wasted on fanciful bridges.

I move on to public transport. Since 2015, Translink has been required to maintain the existing public transport network, yet insufficient public subsidy has been supplied by government. As a result, Translink's reserves have declined from some £56.7 million in 2015 to a projected £21.1 million by the end of March. If Translink continues at that level of funding while being required to maintain the current public transport networks, it has indicated that there will be a shortfall of £29 million in the next financial year. The moneys that are going into the Department for Infrastructure through the authorisation of this Budget will be insufficient if maintained at last year's level. There will be a crisis in our public transport network if Translink is unable to maintain the networks. If Ministers require the company to maintain them at the present level of funding, the company will go bust. That is just basic economics.

Translink is run by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, which is subject to company law. Company law requires the directors to act and take decisions responsibly. If Ministers insist that funding will continue at the current level and the existing network be maintained at that level, the company will not be able to do so. We will hit a crisis. The crisis will come fairly soon, possibly even before the Budget in June or July. I do not know what

Translink's cash flow situation will be during the period. It may be suffering stress. Not only will it be losing funds but it will also have to build in potential redundancies, which will bring additional funding stresses. I do not want that to happen, and it would be irresponsible to let it happen. I have no doubt that it would be against the wishes of the Northern Ireland public and the Assembly. Only a few weeks ago, we passed a motion indicating that we should do everything that we can to prevent climate change. Public transport is one such way of minimising CO2 emissions and pollution in our cities, so it is vital that we have an efficient public transport system.

I now move on to our electricity infrastructure. We have a requirement to keep down the cost of electricity and to make full use of renewable energy, again following our commitment to fight climate change. I understand that, as well as improving the availability of renewable energy, a North/South interconnector could save Northern Ireland's electricity consumers some £20 million a year. Will the Executive ensure that we have the appropriate North/South infrastructure to support renewable energy in Northern Ireland and on the island of Ireland?

That is the challenge that Ministers face, and I hope that the Executive rise to that challenge.

6.15 pm

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He is quite right to raise energy as a massive problem that should be discussed within the Budget debate. He talks about a North/South interconnector, and whilst I am supportive of all interconnection because of the flexibility that it brings, it does not necessarily bring savings. There are a plethora of issues that come into that to build up the price and cost of energy to consumers. I am very worried about the capacity and leadership of SONI, and its independence and governance, at this time. Does the Member agree that we await with interest the Utility Regulator's review and investigation of this very important subject?

Mr Beggs: I agree that that is a key issue going forward, and I too look forward to that report. I also highlight the need for a level playing field throughout the island of Ireland — Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There should not be favoured areas for energy generation that could potentially work against companies in Northern Ireland. It is important that there is a fair and level playing field.

I turn now to health, bearing in mind that 45% of the health budget is put forward in this Budget Bill. It is important that we address resource pressures on the Health Department, but it is also important that we look at the unacceptable conditions that many of our health staff are working in. Capital investment could improve their ability to treat patients and improve services. Under Bengoa, we are to modernise our service. We need investment in our staff and facilities so that we can improve healthcare. We need to develop new services, and that will be difficult in some areas. On occasions, we will all have to travel further, but, if we are getting a higher quality of service, that is what we must do.

What areas will we choose to spend our funding on? There are choices when we spend our capital funds. There are even choices on where we spend it within health. There are choices when we commit huge amounts of capital to other schemes, as I mentioned earlier, because, when it is

spent on other schemes, there is no money left to invest in health.

I want particularly to highlight the need for investment in primary healthcare, where Northern Ireland lags considerably behind best practice in Great Britain. I welcome the investment to date in our multidisciplinary teams — again, a number of Members have mentioned them — which support our GPs. This enables health issues to be addressed much earlier by physios, occupational therapists, community psychiatric nurses and social workers; allows much assessment and treatment to occur away from our hospitals; and helps to address waiting lists by taking pressure away from consultants. It also helps patients by addressing conditions before they, perhaps, worsen and become much more significant.

I also want to highlight the need for investment in primary health facilities within my East Antrim constituency. We have no ED in the East Antrim constituency. We have no minor injuries unit within the East Antrim constituency. We do not have a modern health and care centre within the East Antrim constituency. Somehow, health capital investment has overlooked the East Antrim constituency. None has been made in Larne, Carrickfergus or Newtownabbey. We have aging health centres that require investment to help our GPs and primary healthcare providers improve the services and expand what they can do. I am thinking particularly of the Taylors Avenue health centre, which was built in the 1960s. It is crammed and out of date. In fact, the day centre on that site closed over a decade ago. I think the facility was built for less than a third of the population that presently exists there. Again, the Gloucester Avenue health centre in Larne is equally in need of investment, as is the Abbots Cross medical centre in Newtownabbey. We need modern health and care facilities in order to take the pressure away from our hospitals and to support our GPs and the new multidisciplinary teams that are emerging. We should be doing more away from our hospitals.

I also highlight to the Minister the fact that how we choose to spend money affects where we cannot spend it. If we fund pet projects, others will be left behind. I noticed recently a further bid for — I do not know the exact figure — £30 million or £40 million for Casement Park, which would take the public investment to, I understand, over £100 million. Again, if you spend money there, it will not be available for housing or healthcare.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I just want to finish my point. Rugby received £14.7 million in 2011 and built the new Kingspan Stadium. Football received £25 million for Windsor Park. I understand that some £36 million was committed to other stadia at that stage. At that time, Casement Park was allocated £61.4 million. I was always taught to cut your cloth according to your means. If the GAA has designed a stadium costing 50% more than the public funds that were allocated, is it not up to the GAA to fill the gap? *[Interruption.]* Is it not up to it to put forward some of its money? I understand that it has an income of about €65 million each year *[Interruption]* so I would like to see it step forward to invest in such a facility.

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Beggs: Can it increase its contribution? The additional moneys should not automatically come from the public

purse, because, as I said earlier, that will result in fewer houses being built and fewer health and care facilities being built. We have choices. It is curious that, in the design process, there was no regard to the cost.

Ms Anderson: I thank the Member for giving way. Do you not think that the reason why we are struggling to get housing built is the impact of austerity? I have been listening very carefully to you. You have been talking about how this has been a global crisis, but you have not referred to the fact that the recession has been the context of what you have been saying. We have the recession-rich, and we have an elite, for instance, in London. There are 80 billionaires in London — the most billionaires of any city in the world — whose wealth increases by £77 million per day. In justifying these cuts to the Budget here by saying that Ministers have to live within their means, I do not think that are you giving due regard to the fact that the reason why we are in this situation is that the Tory Administration have produced policies and programmes that have benefited the super-rich. Therefore, I ask the Member to be a little bit mindful of that.

The A5 is one of the projects you mentioned that you have problems with; now it is Casement Park. You know, people out there —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member end her intervention?

Ms Anderson: — might be forgiven for thinking that these projects within —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member —?

Ms Anderson: Sorry. That these projects within only particular areas —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member resume her seat?

Mr Beggs: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Those are interesting thoughts. Again, it is all austerity's fault. Listen, we have choices to make with the money that comes to us. If you want to change the taxation measures in the United Kingdom, go to Westminster and vote for changes. Do not stand here and complain —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member make his remarks through the Chair?

Mr Beggs: — about taxation in the UK.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member make his remarks through the Chair? Thank you.

Mr Beggs: There is no point coming here to complain about the taxation measures in the United Kingdom, if you do not go there to try to change them. There is no point continuing to blame austerity. Let us remember the then Labour Treasury Minister who, after he lost the election, left a note in a bottom drawer for the incoming Minister, saying, "Sorry, no money left. They spent it all". There is a problem if you borrow, borrow and borrow, beyond even your annual running costs, and that is what was happening. Western society was spending money that it did not have. It is very difficult — it is not nice not being able to spend money on everything that you want to — but there are choices that can be made.

The Member's intervention was interesting. I did not criticise the £61.4 million for Casement Park; what I criticised was an additional bid for, I think, another £40 million. Why did the design not follow the brief to build

whatever they wanted to build with the money that was available to them or to raise additional moneys privately through the organisation that wanted the stadium? I would have thought that that was a measured and reasonable point to make. If we spend another £30 million or £40 million of public funds on that particular stadium, it will result in fewer houses being built and less chance of healthcare centres being built in my constituency.

Mr McNulty: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Yes.

Mr McNulty: It is misleading for the Member to attribute the overspend to design issues with the GAA. It was purely down to delays as a result of the Assembly being down and other planning hold-ups. It was not purely a question of the design. It is also misleading to say that the money for Casement Park is capital funding. It is ring-fenced for infrastructure only and should not be confused with funds and pressures available for other services.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for his comment, but, sorry, when you build a new stadium, it is capital money. It may be ring-fenced capital money, but it is capital money. What we are talking about here is the bid for additional capital money. Mention was made of the 50%. We are talking about an eight-year period from when those figures were originally brought out. There has not been 50% inflation in that period, so something has gone badly wrong. If additional costs have been incurred because, perhaps, of a restriction on the site, those who designed it should have reduced the size accordingly to live within their means. They should not be coming back here simply for more money, because there is a cost to other public services if we commit more money to individual schemes.

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

Mr Catney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I have been very generous; I have given way to numerous people. I wish to proceed a little bit.

I want to prioritise investment in health, and in primary healthcare in particular, in my constituency. I am also aware of huge pressures in Antrim Area Hospital, which has some of the highest bed occupancy rates of any of the health trusts in Northern Ireland. The managers there are very efficient and a bed hardly gets cold. They are very professional in making the best use of those beds, and that is good. What we must be clear about, however, is that, where there are not sufficient beds, a hospital reaches a point where it becomes inefficient. It needs to have some spare capacity so that it can react to the pressures that come to bear.

Mr Catney: I thank the Member for giving way. On the subject of Casement Park, I remember the proposal being made to build a new stadium at the Maze. It was agreed between soccer, rugby and the GAA, but some politicians in here got themselves involved with a lobby. We could have had that brand new stadium sitting there without political interference. That is a fact. Windsor Park and the GAA had agreed to move out to the Maze. They are all victims of their own success. Money was spent on soccer and rugby and the GAA are entitled to the money for that plan as they see fit. Yes, the costs have risen, but that is not the fault of the GAA.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I advise Members to make their remarks through the Chair, please. OK?

Mr Beggs: As I said, I do not feel that the full cost of the additional moneys should fall upon the public purse.

If organisations have not controlled their expenditure and put in bids way above inflation, they have a responsibility to step up to the mark so that health and care centres can be built in my constituency and in your constituency, and houses can be built throughout Northern Ireland.

6.30 pm

I will go back to Antrim Hospital — I thought that you wanted to intervene on that — where there are huge pressures because it has an inadequate number of beds. Beds have closed at Whiteabbey Hospital, which puts additional pressures on Antrim Hospital. They have come up with innovative working methods to try to minimise the number of beds required so that they can continue to operate and to minimise trolley waits in A&E. Even with all that, the occupancy rate is so high that it is inefficient not to have some spare capacity to deal with peaks in A&E. Additional funding is needed at Antrim Hospital to deal with those pressures.

We need to continue to support modern facilities. I go back to my experience of ICATS at Ballymena Health and Care Centre. I had an old rugby injury in my shoulder, and I was able to be X-rayed and assessed by a physiotherapist. Regrettably, I had to wait about six months before I got treatment, but it certainly brought about improvement. All that happened without having to go to a consultant. We need those new health and care facilities and innovative working methods. We need to empower a wide range of healthcare staff to remove the bottlenecks. That is important, as there is a shortage of consultants. Continuing to rely on expensive locum doctors and locum nurses is not the way forward. We need to train more nurses, doctors and GPs, and we need a new GP training course and facilities for medical training in Londonderry. We have to commit to that in order to address the needs of our community.

I want to highlight the failure to adequately link the education capital budget and area plans. I hope that they will be linked in next year's Budget. I recently visited Carrickfergus Academy following the amalgamation of Carrickfergus College and Downshire School. It was in line with the area plan, and the governors went along with it and have amalgamated. However, this in turn has created huge pressures. The school's infrastructure is not satisfactory. It needs investment urgently. In addition, the funding process for schools, once they amalgamate, creates problems. The Minister of Education needs to address that matter, and the Finance Minister should look at it as well. Mention was made of the need for a single education system. When we have brought schools together, the system has not worked. We need to make sure that, when schools amalgamate, it is seen to work. I hope that the Minister of Education, when he visits later this week, will see the need for that investment in order to improve education.

There is something fundamentally wrong with our education budgets. Even when schools are at full capacity and the classrooms are full, they cannot operate within budget. Perhaps that is because teachers are more

experienced and happen to be at the top of their spine points. It is wrong that pupils should suffer and the school has no fat left to trim and no options.

It was mentioned that we should not operate in silos. There is a need for cross-departmental working and funding to address educational underachievement. Recently, the Education Minister, in answer to an Assembly question for written answer that I submitted to him, disclosed the breakdown of wards with less than 85% school attendance by post-primary pupils. I was shocked to find that a ward in my constituency had 43% of young people with less than 85% attendance at school — the worst in Northern Ireland — and that the figure for two neighbouring wards was 27%. That area has very weak community infrastructure. It is an area where cross-departmental working is needed to address the issue. The school, the parents and the community need to recognise the importance of education, so that our young people are not left behind. Young people who do not attend school may well leave without education and end up being deemed as not in education, training or employment. They may well struggle in future life. It is important that we intervene earlier and give everyone a better start.

There are huge challenges. My colleagues and I will endeavour to engage constructively to try to ensure that we make the best use of our limited funds. I hope that Ministers and the Executive are listening and will take constructive comments as they are meant. They are meant to try to improve the lot of everyone in our community.

Mr Durkan: Believe it or not, I have been called a bit sooner than expected, so I have not had an opportunity to finish my speech. I was a wee bit concerned about structure and content, but, having heard the previous contributor, I will be all right *[Laughter.]* You will be all right.

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

Mr Durkan: We will be here all night.

Mr Beggs: I advise the Member that, if he occasionally mentions the 45% and the Vote on Account, he will be all right.

Mr Durkan: That will do as my mention.

I speak as the SDLP spokesperson on social justice. I have heard a lot over the past couple of days about the need for us here in the North or Northern Ireland to increase productivity and output and maximise our economic performance. That is extremely important, but we will never do that unless we address the real, fundamental inequalities in our society and meaningfully tackle poverty and its myriad associated issues and outcomes.

As a member of the Communities Committee, I recognise the massive transformative role that the Department for Communities and, of course, the Executive as a whole have to play. The magnitude of that Department's role is reflected in the legislative programme that has come from the Executive Office. We need to ensure that everyone here has a roof over their head. The right to shelter and heat is a basic requirement that is essential for our population's health and well-being and is integral to outcomes in education and employment. The rapid reclassification of our housing associations is essential to ensure that there is increased finance to build more social and affordable homes to meet a need that continues to

spiral. Over the past couple of days, a few Members have mentioned the current problems of the Housing Executive and touched on potential solutions. We must allow the Housing Executive, which I will always defend dearly, to restructure. We must enable it to borrow and build, never mind realising the revenue required to ensure that its existing properties are up to modern standards.

Food bank usage across the North is evidence enough of the desperate situation that many of our constituents live in. It has undeniably got worse since the onset of universal credit and other elements of the cruel welfare reform agenda that the DUP and Sinn Féin accepted. We welcome the way that the mitigation package has cushioned the blow for many and that the current Minister, Deirdre Hargey, has moved swiftly to extend those mitigations, particularly on bedroom tax, but we need to hear what else will be in the new mitigation package. We cannot be content with merely extending existing mitigations; we need to strengthen them to close the gaps in the safety net of social security that so many vulnerable people have fallen through.

What about the two-child rule? It is a hugely unpalatable, draconian and, in our view, completely unacceptable piece of legislation that came to pass after the design of our mitigation package. Will it be mitigated? How will it be mitigated? What will be the cost of that? Some people will raise an eyebrow at the cost of the mitigations. I have asked what were maybe rhetorical questions about the cost of mitigating the impact of the two-child rule, and I think that, conservatively, you are looking at £56 million a year. Another estimate would be closer to £80 million. That is on top of the £20-odd million for bedroom tax and other mitigations that needs to be paid. Some people will raise an eyebrow at the cost of the mitigations, but what will be the cost of not mitigating? It is incalculable. More poverty means more debt, more homelessness, more hopelessness and a bigger cost to health, mental and physical, to families and to society. What would be the cost to our local economy of taking that money out of people's pockets? They are people who spend their money in local shops and the local hairdresser and in pubs and taxis. Local businesses would clearly suffer as a result, and more jobs would inevitably be lost. How can we afford a mitigations package? How can we not?

The Department for Communities has an extremely broad remit, and the Minister has an awful lot of areas of responsibility, one of which is local government. Again, that has not been immune to the austerity agenda or to cuts. I have been in contact with the Minister and her Department recently about the rates support grant, which is a much-needed support mechanism for less affluent councils — the poorer areas, if you like. It is given to them for a reason, which is that they have a much lower rate base. It is to allow them to roll out the services that a local authority should be able to. I acknowledge that the Minister has recently met councils on the issue, but I now appeal to the Finance Minister to consider ring-fencing and protecting that grant, similar to the derating grant that every council can avail itself of and that is afforded statutory protection. I am hopeful that his response will be more positive than that of a predecessor of his, who told me that everyone had to feel a bit of pain, when I approached him about the same issue. It was not a party colleague, Minister Murphy.

That brings me to 'New Decade, New Approach'. We have heard plenty about it. There was a lot of positive stuff for a couple of days, and there has been a lot of less positive stuff for the last number of weeks as we try to get our heads round the plethora of promises and the suite of commitments that we have signed up to. We in the SDLP have signed up to them. We have made the decision to come into the Executive in good faith on the understanding that we can work with other parties in the Executive and outside the Executive to deliver on the things that matter so much to people. That is why they are in that document. A number of Members touched on this when talking about the importance of cross-departmental working, but part of that new approach is that we identify the things in that document not merely as ministerial commitments or priorities but as Executive commitments and priorities, and, therefore, it is incumbent on all of us to do what we can to meet those in this Budget cycle.

That will require a degree of prioritisation and tough decisions being made. However, Ministers cannot afford to sit around the Executive table and decide that none of them can afford to do anything in the document. That is why now might be a very good time for the Finance Minister and the Executive to look at an old approach that worked very well: the establishment of key Executive funds to deal with cross-cutting issues. Those were set up under the first Executive, and, around the time of suspension between 2003 and 2007, things got "re-departmentalised". I appreciate that there was a bit more money at the time, but Departments were basically top-sliced, so when there were projects that were so cross-cutting and ticked so many boxes, those were dealt with. Things often fall down when projects are so cross-cutting. Everyone has a degree of responsibility, so no one takes responsibility and passes the project on. I have said it before that Departments are always good at buying into things but not always so good at paying into things.

6.45 pm

If we can collectively identify the priorities that we believe are achievable in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document and approach them in the collegiate manner that the Minister of Finance himself referred to yesterday, good progress can be made on a lot of the issues. Furthermore, if and when some more money comes from the Treasury, be it in the guise of Barnett consequentials or if Minister Murphy has some unprecedented and, if I dare say, unexpected success in extricating it from the Treasury, that could go into a New Decade, New Approach fund. One of the pledges in New Decade, New Approach is to tackle mental health and to do more on suicide prevention. That is not the sole responsibility of Robin Swann. As I have mentioned before, I am heartened that the Executive have come out and said that they are committed to those pledges, but let us see that in action. Every Department has a role to play, and every Department should have a price to pay.

Another issue in the document is how we should tackle the climate emergency. Translink has been very much in the news over the past week or so, and it was to the fore in a number of Members' remarks over the past couple of days. It is ridiculous to hear some Members talk about it being the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' responsibility to tackle the climate crisis when, again, it is incumbent on all Departments to do so. It is hard to think

of a better or more effective way in which to do that than to ensure that public transport is adequately funded. We should be looking at expanding not contracting services. The first thing that should be done in that regard is to look at the reinstatement of the fuel duty rebate that every public transport company across Britain can access but that Translink does not or cannot access. In that respect, the company is already starting at a lower point.

Another thing that is of huge importance to me — you will be relieved to hear that I will not major on it — is tackling the economic imbalance across the region. That cannot be overstated. I know that other Members have touched on the subject over the past couple of days, but, for my constituency, the real driver to that economic regeneration has to be the expansion of the university at Magee. That is about more than helping Derry and its surrounding areas. It is about improving outputs from Northern Ireland and outcomes for those in the North.

We do have a solid commitment — probably the only or the most solid commitment — in New Decade, New Approach around the medical school. That is brilliant, but it is still not enough. We need to go beyond that and meet the commitments that were made by previous Executives around the expansion, the lifting of the maximum student number (MaSN) cap and getting to 10,000 students. That would have a really transformative impact not just on the city and region, but for so many young people and families here who have to leave these shores to seek education elsewhere. The sad and undeniable reality is that the vast majority of them do not come back here to live and contribute to our economy. They are the very outward-looking and forward-thinking people that we need here to drive us forward as a society as well as an economy.

One of the Members who spoke earlier quite rightly talked about the need to address public-sector pay issues. That is something that we cannot ignore. I am delighted that the Minister of Health, with the support of other Ministers, moved so quickly to address the pay parity issue, which should never have arisen in the first place, but there are other issues right across our public services and Civil Service. I think that Paul Frew chatted about the voluntary exit scheme (VES) earlier. If not, it must have been the one thing that you did not talk about. *[Laughter.]* It might have been Mr Beggs. When the voluntary exit scheme was proposed, a proposal of ours was that savings made through the VES — it was not a one-off saving; these savings are realised every year — should be ploughed in to pay restoration measures, like addressing some of the legacy or hangover issues of Agenda for Change, disparity in pay across old education and library boards, and issues around Civil Service pay, but, sadly, that fell on deaf ears. It is not too late to do something about it, because we are still, or should still, be seeing the savings from the VES.

I touched on the importance of mental health and suicide prevention, and I spoke about how every Department has a degree of responsibility for that. I think of a project in my constituency that has been proposed and designed. The proposers of it have been round a number of Departments, with Health and Infrastructure, obviously, being two of the main ones. It is called Our Future Foyle, and it could have a really transformative impact. You need to see the presentation to see just how impressive it is and how impactful it really could be. That will need funding from a number of different Departments. I would like to see that

being looked at. It is not a pet project per se, but it ticks the boxes that I spoke about earlier. It is cross-cutting, and it would be a good example of the collegiate approach that is required, not just desired, if we are to do anything differently here — if there is going to be anything new about our approach in this new decade.

I will wrap it up there and possibly intervene with another couple of questions to Members coming after. Again, I emphasise the real need for that new approach. It has to be about how Ministers work together and Departments work together. We have always encouraged that, but we have to go beyond encouragement; it is now something that we have to demand.

Miss Woods: I will speak very briefly this evening about the process that we are going through and the Budget Bill, because I believe that that is actually the subject that we are speaking about today. Budgeting is crucial for the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive. That is a given, but what we have here, after a three-year hiatus when there was no fully functioning Assembly, is a wholly inadequate process with no time for scrutiny. What really is our role here? Are we a scrutiny body that is not being offered the chance to do that? Instead, we are just discussing a process that has already been decided.

The Barnett consequentials were made unusually late, adversely impacting the Budget planning timetable. We have an unknown late Budget being announced in Westminster by the Chancellor, with potentially more cuts coming down the line, topped off with years of Tory austerity, risks of further recession and, of course, Brexit. We had the Vote on Account yesterday and will vote on this today, allocating 45% of budgets for Departments to continue their work, which, of course, is needed for financial planning and continuity of services. What we do not have is any detail, and that, we know, is where the devil lies.

We are doing more of the same, and this has happened before. We are in a new decade, but this does not seem to mean a new approach, and that is what we have been calling for. We do not have a Programme for Government published, and we were given a limited legislative programme with no costings attached. There is no clarity for funding on the commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, and it needs to be asked, "How was this even agreed?". It was not costed, and there was clearly no funding agreed between the parties. How can anyone have signed up to this wish list without doing so? Is that an example of good governance or of doing things differently? I do not think so.

As the House debated, we are facing a climate emergency, but there is a complete lack of a mitigation budget. Where are the money and resources dedicated to an emergency that is cross-cutting and cross-departmental? It is not something that we can categorise totally into one Department or another; it needs overarching resources and legislation to drive forward what we need to do. We cannot deal with public transport, the future of infrastructure or air quality and our health issues without dealing with our emissions and climate mitigations, but none of that is apparent here.

Yesterday, the Finance Minister responded to issues raised on the Floor over the timing of this, and he mentioned that scrutiny time would be available in the coming months as Committees got the opportunity to pore over the actual

Budget before June. How can any great change occur premised on the Budget Bill as it stands today, in which no change and no allocations are detailed? We need to be much more ambitious for the society that we need and want, and, as I stated a few weeks ago in this Chamber, this is not a keep calm and carry on situation; this is not business as usual. Yet, we have no new fiscal approach; we have no green new deal; and we have nothing here about a just transition. Is this a fine example of government green-washing? This is more of the same, and it is something that we cannot continue to do.

Mr Allister: Yesterday, because I was so generous with interventions, I allowed myself to be led astray and did not get to finish the remarks that I wanted to make. I indicated that there were some matters that I might refer back to and, with your indulgence, I will.

I asked one question yesterday of the Minister — I think that I had it answered in previous Budget debates, but if I did, I have forgotten the answer — and I am genuinely interested to know the answer. Why is it that, in the vote for Supply, we only vote on resources? Why do we not vote on capital? In the forthcoming period, there will be capital expenditure. I am sure that there is a technical and perfectly logical explanation, but I would like to be reminded of what it is.

Some of the matters that I want to refer to touch upon the openness and transparency of the system, particularly some of the items that appear in the spring Supplementary Estimates booklet. The Minister referred this morning to the black-boxing of certain expenditure. He explained that, where there is no other already approved legislative authority for spend, one can, within these procedures, authorise that expenditure on the sole authority of the Budget Act, putting a little black box beside it to indicate that that is so. All that is entirely correct because it comes out of the 'Managing Public Money' document.

That 'Managing Public Money' document then circumscribes the circumstances in which you can do that. It is very clear, in the appendix to that, at paragraph 2.5.15, that:

"In certain limited circumstances departments may obtain authorisation for their planned expenditure by relying entirely on the authority of the Budget Act, rather than through specific empowering legislation."

It then says that the Assembly can do that subject to conditions, and the first condition is that the expenditure is no more than £1.5 million a year or is expected to last for no more than two years.

7.00 pm

Applying that test to some of the matters that have been black-boxed in the Estimates raises the questions that I have. If you turn to page 228 of the Supplementary Estimates and you begin to read about the Executive Office, you see that it says:

"under the sole authority of Part I of the Estimate and of the confirming Budget Act as follows:"

You read down a list that includes expenditure relating to the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board of £434 million. 'Managing Public Money' is quite clear that the limit on black-boxed expenditure is £1.5 million. Here we have

a colossal sum of £434 million black-boxed as approved under the sole authority of the Estimates.

I have two questions about that. Surely, that was authorised under the legislation passed in Westminster, and, therefore, it does not need to be black-boxed. If that is not correct, how can it be black-boxed over the limit that is in 'Managing Public Money' of £1.5 million? My second question about that is: why is it duplicated in the Department of Justice figures? When you go to the Department of Justice section, you see that it is black-boxed there as well, on page 199. There is Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service expenditure relating to the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board of £434 million. Why is it black-boxed under two Departments, in both cases in excess of the limit? Is it not already provided for in legislation, in which case it would not need to be black-boxed?

The same arises in respect of victims and survivors' payments of £105 million. On page 228, it is black-boxed under TEO. On page 199, the exact same figure is black-boxed under the Department of Justice. Maybe there is an explanation and that is why I am asking, but why are we being presented with documents that, on the face of it, have those contradictions and those irregularities, particularly in circumstances where these are documents that should be, as far as they can be, intelligible for the purposes of openness and transparency? I do ask that.

On a similar theme, I want to ask a question relating to the Department for the Economy, which, at page 59, has black-boxed almost £15 million for Northern Ireland Screen. However, when you flick back a page or two in the Estimates for the Department for the Economy, you discover that the very figure that has been black-boxed appears as a grant on page 49. If it is already in the detail of money under grants, why is it black-boxed on page 59? If there are answers to that, I would be delighted to have them but, looking at these things, it seems to me that there is a certain shoddiness, but maybe it is not; maybe it is, but I am surprised, subject to the explanation that is proffered as to how those matters arose and how they have appeared in that situation. That was the sort of stuff that I wanted to ask about yesterday. I look forward in this debate or subsequently to receiving an explanation about that.

In the overall context of the budgetary arrangements, where now stands the financial process reform, which the Department was taking forward for some years? Has that been implemented? Has it been abandoned? Is it still a work in progress? What exactly is the position with the financial process reform?

I want to comment, if I might, on the position going forward. We heard many references today to the need for prudence, sensibility, living within our means and the necessity to demonstrate to the public our probity in respect of handling public money. All those things are right and proper. In the same breath, we heard about the extreme pressures on various sectors: health, education and infrastructure. Outside the House yesterday, we heard the Minister talk about the fact that, for the future Budget, he is already £600 million short.

If that is the context in which the House is dealing with public finances, the Budget Bill and prudent expenditure, it leads me to ask the question: why, then, are some — indeed, why are the Executive — wanting to indulge

themselves in various vanity projects? There is an example of one today. Since the First Minister and deputy First Minister want to spend £11 million annually on Irish language and associated concepts, I asked the Health Minister, whose mathematical skills maybe mean that he should be the Finance Minister, what £11 million would buy for us in the health service in extra nurses. Wizard-like, he told us that £11 million a year equates to 275 extra nurses. Knowing of the need in health, knowing of the shortfall, knowing of the constant stream through our offices of people complaining about waiting lists, delays, not being able to get a bed, not being able to access the health service in the manner in which they ought, who of us, faced with that, could say to any of our constituents, "Well, in fact, it is more important to have Irish language or the nonsense of Ulster Scots than to have 275 extra nurses a year". Yet the Executive, First Minister and deputy First Minister are saying to the Northern Ireland community, "We want to take £11 million of scarce resources and not give it to the health service or schools. We want to put it into Irish language or Ulster-Scots identity projects. Suck it up. You may be short of nurses and other things, but this is so important that we are determined to do it". We talk about priorities. Is the House not headed in entirely the wrong direction when it comes to priorities? It is a colossal sum of money for that sort of project.

Let me refer Members to the fact that the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which does real work in the community and is essential to the whole process and workings of government, has an annual budget of just over £7 million. It has a staff of 106. In recent years, it has diminished its budget demand and staffing by tightening its belt. Here we are saying, "Never mind the Audit Office with its £7 million. Irish language and the rest of it needs £11 million. Never mind that the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Commissioner for Older People run on a fraction of £11 million. We are to ring-fence £11 million of resources for language issues". Really?

Then, we stand up in the House and empathise with our constituents about their real needs. We say how appalling it is that they do not have the health service that they deserve and how we will make sure that they do. At the same time, we talk about wanting to squander money like that. It is time that the House took a good look at itself when it comes to these issues.

Mr McHugh: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Certainly.

Mr McHugh: The Member refers to money being spent on the Irish language. It is a tirade that I listen to often. I remind the Member that the Irish language is not there in splendid isolation. It is the language of a community and the language of this country. For many in the community involved in the Irish language — in fact, a continually growing number — it is also their first language, and they, too, have health issues. The language is ingrained in them and is part of what is important to them. Isolating those people from their language or pretending, for one second, that money being spent on the Irish language does not also address the educational needs and health issues of that very same community is, in itself, a fallacy.

Mr Allister: Let me deal with that. It is not as though the Irish language community has been starved of funding for

all these years and, suddenly, we will spend £11 million on it. Sorry, but the Irish language community has been one of the most feted communities in Northern Ireland. It has its own education system where, unlike any other sector, you can form a primary school with 12 pupils, whereas primary schools in the controlled sector face closure. The Irish-medium sector has its own North/South body with executive powers. It is a sector that has had expenditure of over £200 million in recent years. No one need pretend that the Irish language sector is being neglected.

It has been feted beyond belief, and now we are going to pour — squander, rather — £11 million on some vanity nonsense about Ulster Scots and the Irish language and appoint endless commissioners and staff to enforce it on those who do not even want it.

7.15 pm

I am saying to the House, “You need to get your priorities right”. I was about to say, “This House in particular needs to get its priorities right”, because the House under the “New Deal, New Dreams” document is going to provide for interpretation services. We are going to squander I do not know how many hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of pounds, in the House to provide a service that no one needs. There is not a single Member who needs the English language interpreted so that they can understand it. There is not a Member who needs it interpreted into Ulster Scots — think of it — or into Irish, yet, as part of this vanity project, we are saying that the House shall have interpretation services, it shall have instant translation services and it will be provided with headsets to listen to those few Members who can speak Irish, with yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker, being a notable exception. We will not have to wear the headsets for very long with some Members, because once they get past the opening remarks, there will not be much to say.

Think of the folly. The absolute squandering folly of a House in which every one of the 90 Members — yes, I will say it — adequately speaks English.

A Member: Do not go too far.

Mr Allister: No, I will not go too far. Everyone adequately speaks English. Nonetheless, the House is going to have this nonsense expenditure, while, meantime, people cannot get a bed in our hospitals and kids cannot get their special needs assessment.

It is time we took a look at ourselves, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is time we got our priorities right. When a Minister comes to the House with a Budget that has its priorities right, then it will be a Budget deserving of support, but a Budget that anticipates that sort of foolhardy, unnecessary expenditure is not one that should recommend itself to the House.

Mr Carroll: Mr Deputy Speaker, yesterday I stood with workers at the Belfast courts who are striking because they cannot get the pay they deserve and because measures like redundancies have increased their workload substantially. For those who have not joined those workers on the picket lines, I can tell you that the level of mistrust that they have for politicians is massive. There is a frustration that has deepened as their struggle has gone on, and it is hard to imagine how the way that the Bill will probably be passed today will alleviate that mistrust one bit.

We have heard a lot about Tory austerity, and, indeed, I am an ardent opponent of the Tories in general and the austerity measures in particular from Westminster that have crippled communities like mine. There is an irony, however, Mr Deputy Speaker, to sitting in the Chamber and listening to the big parties talk about Tory austerity. The Civil Service workers who were on strike yesterday and again today are on picket lines because the Assembly has so far refused to pay them the wage that they deserve. Of course, a lump sum from Westminster would go some way towards solving that problem, but let us not forget about the parties in the Chamber that prioritised tax handouts for big corporations for a decade. This would have cost us £300 million per year from our block grant, and the big parties can readily envision £300 million for big business, but they cannot envision the money needed for the civil servants that they have been falling over themselves to thank over the last few days for running this place for the last three years.

Those same parties were so opposed to Tory austerity that they introduced welfare reforms on the Tories' behalf, decimating our welfare system and driving people to food banks and into poverty. They told us that there was no money to implement pay parity for health workers, but only after they signed up to PFI schemes in our health service and beyond to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds. Lo and behold, when the nurses and health workers refused to give up the fight, the money that we were told was not there for pay was found pretty quickly in the Stormont coffers. No Westminster lump sum was necessary.

I labour the point because it is hypocritical at best for parties to condemn Tory austerity on the one hand while implementing it with the other. I mean austerity measures such as thousands of public-sector job losses. It might have been 20,000 public-sector job losses, but, thankfully, they did not get their wish.

These are the parties of RHI. We listen to the Finance Minister suggest that the Assembly is in need of some £600 million. It is quite glaring that almost that exact figure was burned as part of the RHI scandal: a scheme that they should have shut down but did not. The hundreds of millions of pounds squandered on the RHI is needed now more than ever for public services.

It is my view that the two big parties, Sinn Féin and the DUP, supported the British Government's new deal primarily to avoid an election. In doing so, they signed up to a deal that secured no costed financial commitments from the British Government. We have heard that the British Government apparently rowed back on the financial promises that they made in negotiations. I ask the Finance Minister to take the opportunity when he comes back to the Dispatch Box to enlighten Members and the public on exactly what those financial promises were. That is the basic level of transparency that I have been calling for since the deal was agreed. His silence on that front leads us to believe that, in order to avoid an election, in which they would likely have lost seats, the two big parties missed a historic opportunity to tie down the British Government to serious commitments.

It is in that context that we are now faced with a continuation of the same old austerity processes, the same context of empty promises and little political will to deliver. All indications point to a continuation of that

theme. Indeed, we listened to almost every Committee Chair in the Assembly speak about hard decisions, cuts and underfunding in the context of the Estimates and this Budget Bill. As I pointed out yesterday, the detail of the Bill contains very concerning elements, such as £24 million in reductions, albeit retrospective, to the budget of DAERA, the Department with responsibility for the environment. At a time when we are addressing climate change — the biggest test of our generation — it is hard not to think, in advance of any new Budget, that the Assembly has already failed the test by approving those figures.

Other glaring reductions are to be written into legislation today, many as concerning as the £24 million from DAERA. Most concerning of all, just like the £24 million, there has been little or no scrutiny or oversight. Every corner of this Chamber seems to agree on that, so I cannot fathom how the Executive, who claim to be championing a new approach for a new decade, are happy to sign off on those figures when they have barely touched the oversight measures demanded by the Assembly. To have financial decisions rubber-stamped by MLAs without a shred of proper scrutiny demonstrates that the Assembly has also failed the test of accountability.

People Before Profit has no truck with such antics.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not. Sorry. All the Executive parties had about seven hours to set out their stall, so I will set out mine without taking any interventions.

We will certainly not be beholden to any austerity Budget. People elected me to take a stand against that kind of behaviour, and that is what I intend to do. We believe that there is a different way forward: one based on taxing the very rich to pay for public services; one based on investing heavily in public services and that enforces proper minimum wages to kick-start our economy, rather than one that drops to its knees, pockets open for whatever multinational corporation is interested; and not an economy that relies on the whim of free-market forces.

We will not stop pushing and pressing to ensure that the Assembly does not make cuts that hurt the most vulnerable, but, if that happens, we will be in our communities organising against it, building people power and throwing our weight behind the trade unions defending workers. Not a week has gone by since the Executive got together without the leaking of a fresh quote about water charges, tuition fees, prescription fees or the sell-off of Housing Executive homes. New Decade, New Approach? It does not feel that way so far.

The five-party Executive, which makes up the majority of the Assembly, clearly needs a strong Opposition. People Before Profit is the socialist opposition in the Chamber. I was elected as a socialist voice, and I will continue to use my platform in that way. That means that, where we see positives, we will support and welcome them; where I can work with the big parties to make positive changes for my constituents, I will do so. I note, for example, fresh talk in the Chamber today about workers' rights. I hope to have the support of those who made comments about workers' rights to ensure that my trade union freedom Bill has a successful journey through the House. Where we get a sniff of harmful moves by the Executive, we will challenge it. We will interrogate those financial moves in particular that have a real impact on the lived experience of people

here. We will not, therefore, offer our approval today. Instead, I will continue to scrutinise and hold the Executive to account in the period ahead.

Mr Wells: I never expected someday to be speaking from this part of the House. I am reminded of the famous line in the song:

*“Clowns to the left of me,
Jokers to the right,
Here I am, stuck in the middle with” —*

— Jim. *[Laughter.]* And I must say —.

Mr Allister: It could be worse.

Mr Wells: I suppose it could be worse. I am glad that there are so many here, because I hold the record in the House for the smallest turnout. Twenty years ago, I had a private Member's motion on the Ballynahinch bypass, to which a grand total of four MLAs turned up: the Speaker, who had to be there; the Minister, who had to be there; the late and much-missed P J Bradley, the wonderful Member for South Down; and myself. I asked myself how I would report that expenditure motion to the people of South Down through the local paper, and it came up with the line, “Mr Wells speaking to a hushed Assembly”. It was hushed because there were only four people here.

We are the last chance saloon as far as the future of the Assembly is concerned. I am not talking about our political differences; I am not talking about a mandatory coalition. I am talking about the ability of the 90 people in the Chamber to prove that we are fit to run Northern Ireland plc. I am one of the very few, along with Mr Beggs — I cannot see any others — who were elected here in 1998. There are probably Members here who were not born in 1998 when the Assembly was established. We have had many false dawns; we have had many failures. Can anyone honestly say that the people of Northern Ireland are any further on in trusting us with their Budget, their expenditure and their services than they were 21 years ago? If you had an opinion poll out on the street, you might find that we are not popular.

About 15 years ago, I attended an Assembly roadshow that was chaired by Eamonn Mallie. All six South Down MLAs were present in Downpatrick. Throughout the night, people shouted, “You're wasters. You're useless. You're only in it for the money. You're no good in running our services”. That went on all night. At the end of it, Eamonn Mallie asked, “How many people think that having an Assembly is a good thing?”. Every hand in the room went up. Mr Mallie said, “Well, you've spent the entire night calling these people a bunch of wasters. Why do you think an Assembly is a good thing?”. Somebody stood up and said, “They might be a bunch of wasters, but they're our wasters”.

For a very long time, we have played upon the patience of our people, and there is not much evidence to show that we are good custodians of the money that is given to us either by our own taxpayers or by the Exchequer through the block grant in London. We are going to have to do something that we have not done in 21 years: we are going to have to start taking some difficult decisions in this House. We have not taken one, in my experience. Not only was I here from 1998, but I was here in 1982 in the old Assembly, and I did not see any difficult decisions taken there. There is only one survivor, and that is Mr Allister. We

are the only ones who have survived all that time to have sat in both Assemblies.

Mr Durkan: You did not survive the DUP. *[Laughter.]*

7.30 pm

Mr Wells: That is true: neither of us survived the DUP. *[Laughter.]* Are we, as an Assembly, prepared to take the really difficult choices? I was aghast when Mr Swann took the portfolio of Health because I have been there, worn the T-shirt and have the scars on my back to show it. It is a very, very difficult post. I said to Robin, "You're mad. Your job is not difficult, it is impossible", and I will tell you why. During the first meeting of the Assembly, everybody stood up and said how prepared they were to support Robin Swann to make the very difficult decisions to implement Bengoa. Does anybody know what Bengoa says? Does anybody know what Hayes says, Donaldson says or Compton says? What they all say is that we are spreading precious financial resources far too thinly over far too many buildings in Northern Ireland. Everybody agrees with that, but they also have the caveat, "I agree with that as long as it never affects my constituency". That is the problem.

We have some terribly difficult decisions to make. It will involve decisions that are the right decisions to make but which will be very unpopular with our constituents. The only way that we will be able to do that is if all 90 Members in the Assembly commit ourselves to putting through those difficult decisions and do not peel off to form "save our community hospital" or "save our community clinic" groups and start lobbying against those trying to make the right decisions. I will be very interested to see, given the fact that Minister Robin Swann, the Member for North Antrim, has asked for £660 million just to keep things on an even keel in Health, whether we will support him when he starts to make the really difficult decisions. I have my doubts.

We have a staffing crisis in Health at the moment. We are 7,000 staff short, including 2,400. That has emerged in the very short time since I was Minister. That issue really did not feature in 2015, and now it is a real crisis. Do we have the political strength and will in the House to say to our medical staff, "If we pour scarce resources into training you to be a doctor, a nurse or a physio, we expect you to stay for five years after you have trained in Northern Ireland"? That will be unpopular. We will get people lobbying us and saying, "I will lose votes amongst the nurses and the doctors". Our nursing problem is lying on Bondi Beach. It is in Vancouver; it is in London. Enough nurses are being trained in Northern Ireland to look after the needs of our community, but, sadly, many of them are being headhunted at trade fairs in the autumn. They go to the four corners of the world and do not come back. They marry the first Ukrainian coming down the street in Sydney, and that is it — they are gone. That is our difficulty. Do we have the political courage to say to those folk, "You're going to stay for five years or else you will pay back the large amount of money that it has cost us to train you"?

Do we have the political courage to change the model of the Housing Executive? It is interesting that the honourable Member for Londonderry Mr Durkan mentioned that earlier. He talked about adapting a new model for the Housing Executive that is more akin to the housing associations, freeing the Housing Executive from the

constraints of the public purse and giving it the power to borrow money — very cheaply at the minute, in the open markets — in the same way as some of the housing associations do. That will not be popular. Mr Carroll, no doubt, will be placarding this Building and saying that it is de facto privatisation, but it is perhaps the only way in which we can prevent a situation where we have to get rid of 43,000 Housing Executive properties. It is a model that has worked very well in the housing associations. Do we have the political will to do it?

Do we have the political will to take Northern Ireland Water? I think that I heard Mr Beggs speaking about this. Mr Beggs, your speech will read marvellously in the 'Antrim Times' next week; I know exactly where it is going. I know that, as I sit down, I will see it in the 'Down Recorder'. I will see it in the 'Londonderry Sentinel' next week. Of course, that is where all these speeches are going. This one is going to the 'Mourne Observer'; I have to say that.

The point is — Mr Beggs mentioned this point — do we have the political courage to change the model of Northern Ireland Water to the Hyder Welsh Water model? It is a not-for-profit company that, again, takes the funding off the balance sheet — in this case, it would be the Department for Infrastructure — and allows private funding to be used to provide a first-class water facility for three million people. At the time when that happened in Cardiff, there was uproar, and the Mr Carrolls of this world, again, were picketing and saying, "This is a disaster. This is the semi-privatisation of our water service". Now, nobody in Wales wants to go back to the old model. They have been freed to invest in upgrading the water and sewerage system to make certain that they no longer have the deficit that we have. They have been able to fund their water supply and sewerage system adequately.

Are we prepared, as an Assembly — this is an unpopular one — to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol? That is not popular — not popular at all. When I suggested that when I was Health Minister, there was uproar, because people said that they would lose votes in the social clubs, the pubs and various other places in Northern Ireland where intoxicating liquors are consumed. We know, however, that such an unpopular decision will save our health service, our judiciary and our social services a fortune, because of the impact of the abuse of alcohol in Northern Ireland. Again, it will take only 10 people from any constituency to lobby their MLA and say that it will bring poverty to Cookstown, Castleberg or Ballycastle for us to be scared and to run from making a difficult decision. They have done it in Wales; why should we not do it in Northern Ireland?

We have just heard today that the honourable Member for Lagan Valley, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, has announced that he is giving £2 million to conservation and environmental charities to carry on good work. That is based on the 5p — or one shilling, as some of us would remember it — plastic bag tax. Could we be radical and increase that to 10p? We could, and double the amount of money available for that necessary work for environmental protection. Again, I have no doubt that the honourable Member for North Antrim Mr Allister, who led the charge against the first plastic bag tax, will be up in arms, saying that that is not acceptable, but really — 10p? Is that too much to ask to try to put our house in order?

More importantly, on the bigger figures, I asked the Minister of Justice how much we were paying out in legal aid to our top barristers in Northern Ireland. The average is £276,000 per barrister. When I asked that question, the top-earning barrister was paid £812,000 a year in legal aid. The lady concerned was not amused, and I am off her Christmas card list. She made the point to me, as did Mr Allister, that that was a spike in her income and that it was earned in an unusual year. I asked how much she got in the previous five years, and it was just over £800,000 a year. The people in the law library said to me, "We need this money to be incentivised to produce a top-class service for our clients". Frankly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would be incentivised for a quarter of that. *[Laughter.]* Would £800,000 incentivise me? Once you get past a quarter of a million pounds, you are well incentivised to do anything. That is money that is being poured out of the Exchequer.

Mr Allister asked a very good question about whether £11 million equated to 275 nurses. What on earth could you get for the total legal aid bill of £26 million? How many nurses or teachers or Roads Service staff would that employ? It strikes me that there must be an upper ceiling on how much we are prepared to pay our top legal people. Remember: this is not their total income; they do not scrape by on £276,000 a year. They can also do some private work to supplement that meagre income. Really, given our situation at the moment, can we justify such vast amounts of money being poured into the coffers of such a small number of people? If we paid them only an average of £150,000 a year, could we get a top-class service? I believe that we could. That is more than even the First Minister gets in Northern Ireland, and it is certainly a lot more than Ministers get.

Finally, I listened with interest to the honourable Member for Londonderry Mrs Anderson, who was pontificating yesterday about the benefits of this mythical united Ireland. The vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want to go to heaven, but they do not want to die on Tuesday. They may have this mythical view of a united Ireland in the dim and distant future, and it would be nice to have it, but hang on. I have to get the children educated; I have to get my little business up and running; and I have to get my house built. Not now, thank you very much, but in some distant future. That is why, recently, only 29% of the people of Northern Ireland, after all the gloom and doom about Brexit and all the apparent success of Sinn Féin in the Irish Republic, are keen about a united Ireland.

I know that I am drifting slightly away from the 45% —.

Ms Anderson: I thank the Member for giving way. If he is so certain about that figure, why not put it to the people? Let the people decide what union we want to be a part of. Do we want to stay, as some from the unionist community argue, with Britain, or do we want to reunite Ireland and go back into the EU? If you are so absolutely confident in that position, let the people decide. It is great that, from yesterday, there have been a number of contributions in the House about the reunification of Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I remind Members that I have allowed a fair bit of latitude in the debate. It is great to hear the ingenuity of some Members and their craft at raising points, which I appreciate, but please could we stay within the constraints of the Budget Bill?

Mr Wells: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am following the lead of the honourable Member for Foyle, who said that, if you keep mentioning 45%, you are absolutely home and dry. Let us talk about the impact on the 45% of a united Ireland. What the honourable Member for Foyle forgets to mention is that it is going to cost the Irish Republic —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Sorry, we are not debating the merits or demerits of a united Ireland this evening, Mr Wells, with the greatest respect. If we could come back to the actualities of the Budget Bill, please.

Mr Wells: I note that one of the other Deputy Speakers showed a great deal of leniency to the honourable Member for Londonderry Ms Anderson, who spoke on exactly this issue yesterday. It is unfortunate that a mere humble, obscure Back-Bencher like myself is being denied the opportunity to refute the honourable Member's suggestion that the Irish Republic can find €2,300 for every man, woman and child to subsidise a united Ireland when, meanwhile, the cost of the subsidy from the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland is £156 per person. Can they afford the £156 a lot more than the €2,300 from the Irish Republic?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I presume your point is made. Please move to the Budget Bill.

Mr Wells: Finally, may I suggest — these are all difficult decisions — that we introduce a development land tax? A lot of land is being banked. Developers have bought it and are not prepared to put housing on it. The honourable Member for Belfast West mentioned that there is a chronic housing shortage, and he is right. Should we introduce a tax that says, "If you are going to bank that land and keep it out of the development stream, we are going to tax you accordingly"?

Devolution came to Northern Ireland at a similar time as to Scotland and Wales. In those two parts of the United Kingdom, public perception of their Assemblies has risen dramatically. They have now bedded into the political system, and no one would dream of asking for those Assemblies to be prorogued. Could we honestly say that there is the same acceptance of this Assembly? Could we say that, when the election is held in two years' time in 2022, our public will have the confidence that we are good stewards of their finance?

If we cannot prove that after 23 years, this Assembly is in deep trouble, and we are most definitely in the last chance saloon. So, no pressure on the Minister of Finance but, if we get it wrong, I do not think that we will have a twelfth or thirteenth chance to get it wrong again. Therefore, we must start to take difficult decisions. We must start to grow up and mature as politicians and to say that being part of the United Kingdom and taking the block grant is simply not a matter of take, take, take. This knee-jerk reaction that we heard today — every Member stood up and said, "I am not here to raise local issues. I am not here to ask for more money", and then what do they do? They ask for more money.

We will have to take those difficult decisions, which will be unpopular, to show that we are mature enough so that when we next bid for extra resourcing from Westminster, we have a clear conscience to say, "We deserve it".

Mr McCrossan: Mr Wells seems to have had a new lease of life since he left the DUP Benches, and it suits him as well.

Members will be well aware that, in the wider public arena, the view of this place has been at an all-time low. Public confidence in this place is non-existent. People are hopeful that we can do something in the next few years to alleviate the considerable pressures in our public services, which have worsened in the absence of the institutions and the House, and the absence of parties working together to deal with the challenges.

Civil servants ran this place in the absence of the institutions for three years. In the absence of elected, accountable politicians, civil servants were told, "Step up. You fill the void. You take the decisions. You make the ship go on". In light of the circumstances and challenges that they faced, they did a fantastic job. Given the circumstances and challenges that they faced, against their wishes on many occasions, we should be thankful that we have a Civil Service that worked and continues to work so hard.

7.45 pm

That brings me to my point. Civil servants have been striking outside offices and places of work for their rightful entitlement to a pay increase that has been withheld from them for a number of years. The restoration of the House offered some hope to quite a number of public-sector workers, but the news of a £600 million shortfall will have dampened spirits. We have debates and discuss the absence of the institutions, but it is important that we recognise at all times the contribution of our Civil Service and its workers. Those are the people who, day and daily, keep the place running and keep our services running, and they have done so in very challenging times. I sincerely hope that the Minister will find a resolution very quickly to ensure that those hard-working people — our hard-working people — get what they are rightfully entitled to.

Yesterday, during the debate on the Vote on Account and Supplementary Estimates, I outlined the vast pressures facing our education system and the issues threatening the very future of our children. The very fact that the education budget needs over £700 million by 2022 compared with this financial year paints a dark and depressing picture for all in the sector. Yesterday, I referred to the teachers' pay dispute, another sore that has rumbled on, leaving teachers without their rightful entitlement to a pay increase that they should have had long before now. As the delay continues, the bill increases. It does not make any sense. A remedy is certainly needed because it is damaging the morale of our teaching workforce, classroom assistants and principals in every school across Northern Ireland. I do not need to explain to Members that teachers, principals and classroom assistants are the bedrock of our education system. Our teachers lay an important foundation in the life of every child, helping children to build a future. They do a tremendous job despite being underpaid and facing significant pressures as the demand increases and challenges continue. I would like to thank, on the record, the many teachers who have gone through those tremendous challenges. They have been underpaid for the last number of years but have continued to step up, show leadership and put the interests of children first.

As other Members have articulated today and the Chair of the Education Committee did in yesterday's debate, special educational needs face crisis conditions. Vulnerable children and their families are being failed

continually. Over the last three years, there has been a 20% increase in statemented children and a 19% increase in the number of non-statemented children who have been identified as having special educational needs attending mainstream schools. However, very little funding has been allocated to ensure that their educational needs are sufficiently met. We need to get this right. We need to ensure that our education budget is properly reflective of the needs of children with special educational needs. That brings me to another point. In the absence of the institutions, the Education Authority, with all of its horror stories, mishandled quite a number of documents in relation to vulnerable children with special educational needs. It was advised, according to a whistle-blower, to deliberately not date-stamp correspondence because it knew that it could not get the thing resolved in time. One principal said:

"In my opinion, the Education Authority is in complete meltdown, and I have never known such a crisis as this in my twelve years in post as a principal."

We have to decide what is fit for purpose in Northern Ireland, and, when it comes to education, we certainly have to start asking questions about the Education Authority, the money that is spent, the money that is offered —

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCrossan: — just a wee second — and how much of that money actually reaches schools, because the pressures are certainly continuing. I give way to the Member.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. I share his concerns about the pressures that he mentioned. Will he agree with me that the damning indictment is that, for three years, institutions such as the Education Authority went about their business with absolutely zero political accountability?

Mr McCrossan: Absolutely. Given that it was founded only a few short years beforehand, it has certainly lacked the political leadership from here and direction on what was necessary to make it properly function. I know many people who work in the Education Authority who do a very good job, but the thing is not fit for purpose, and we need to call it out as we see it. Every principal and every teacher in every school that I have attended in West Tyrone and beyond has, when asked what the problems are in the school, pointed the first finger at the Education Authority. Serious questions need to be asked about the money that we put into it and about how it functions. I am sure that the Minister will do that.

Our mental health services in schools also need better investment now and moving forward into future Budgets. I referenced yesterday the fact that 25 critical incidents occurred in 2017 where the Education Authority was called into schools to deal with suicides, and it is my understanding that it handled them very well, given the circumstances. That is a shocking figure, and it clearly shows the impact that mental health and suicide rates have on young people and children.

In my constituency of West Tyrone, there are a number of budgetary issues that I want to raise that negatively and continually impact on my constituents on a daily basis. Regional imbalance, which is a big term in the House

that has been spoken about by many Members who have walked before me and represented my constituency of West Tyrone and other constituencies west of the Bann, is a major sticking point for so many people in my constituency. Just look at the disparity between the east and the west of the Province.

I will come on to the infrastructure deficit again, because I feel very passionate about it, as many Members will know. We have high rates of unemployment and very high rates of social deprivation and poverty that collectively contribute to the mental health crisis that we are facing. While I fully recognise the great work our medical staff do in the Western Trust, they have not been supported by additional investment or provided with fit-for-purpose facilities, and they have not been provided with funding that reflects the reality of the Western Trust area. That is especially the case with primary care.

Mental health is a crisis that the new Executive must tackle. They should not talk about it, say how terrible it is and say, "We must put money into it", but meaningfully plan for, invest in and tackle it. A few short weeks ago, I visited a mental health facility at a hospital in Derry. I saw fantastic facilities, wonderful staff and a lot of very unwell people. I visited someone in that hospital who is very close to me, who was desperate for help, who reached out for help on many occasions, went to the GP, could not get seen by a community psychiatric nurse (CPN), could not be seen by a psychiatrist and could not receive counselling services.

That person had reached breaking point and asked to be admitted to that very nice facility with very hard-working staff. There was an issue, and that person who was desperate for counselling, help and assistance sat in the hospital for one week. She did not see a psychiatrist and was left sitting in a room looking out a window, with others around her. When I lifted the phone to the chief executive of the trust, the chief executive was rightly horrified. That person's condition worsened because she did not receive the intervention or the care that she needed. I was promised the sun, the moon and the stars and that the situation would be resolved, but I can assure you that, three weeks after that lady left the hospital, there has not been one call or follow-up or any referral to any form of mental health service. She is at breaking point.

Mr Butler: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCrossan: I will. I am told that there is no funding available for services. These are our people. These are our mothers, our fathers, our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, our neighbours and our friends. That lady sat for one week in a hospital to which she had reached out for help, and she did not see any kind of doctor or psychiatrist. That is the issue with our system. They can pump money into things and think that it is a sticking plaster to resolve some of the huge crises that we face. I know that person very well, and it hit me very hard to learn that she reached out and went into the system yet still did not receive any support. I will let the Member intervene.

Mr Butler: Thank you for allowing me to intervene. The Member spoke very well about the strike action that was reluctantly taken by care staff over pay. Does he agree that the predominant reason that the care staff went on strike was workforce planning and the stresses that they face

trying to provide the care that his friend so sadly missed? Three years without government and the associated lack of direction, as well as decisions made by previous Health Ministers, compounded the problems that have led to the crisis that we face today.

Mr McCrossan: Absolutely. There is a lack of planning in the system. There is a lack of workforce planning. We have some of the greatest healthcare staff that you could ever ask for. They are some of the most hard-working, caring people, but they too need to be supported to do the job that they want to do in order to deliver for the people whom they care for. That is the issue with the system. It is not reflective of our medical staff, and it is certainly not reflective of the current Minister, who was brave enough to take on the brief and lead.

Another issue that the Assembly must face is the crisis that the rest of our health service faces: the 300,000 people on health service waiting lists. I hope that funding is secured as part of the New Decade, New Approach deal, as too many are suffering. All of us can relate to that. In our constituency offices, we see people suffering day and daily. For three years, people pleaded with me, as their representative, to do something to help them, but there simply was not the funding there to resolve the huge and deepening crisis with our waiting lists.

It is absolutely shocking and inhumane that over 5,000 people have died every year while waiting to receive some form of treatment. I got that figure from a response to a freedom of information request. To make that directly relevant to Members, that is our mothers, our fathers, our brothers and sisters, our neighbours and our friends. There are big issues in the health service that will require collective responsibility from the House to resolve.

I also want to discuss accessibility to healthcare, and I will take Strabane as an example. My fellow constituency Member Mr McHugh may back me up on this. Day and daily, we are inundated with complaints about the lack of out-of-hours GP services in the Strabane area.

We are told that it has been stripped back due to budget cuts. That makes a bad situation much worse, because people end up going to A&E, which congests our A&E departments.

8.00 pm

Another request that the Minister kindly answered about Western Urgent Care revealed that only 24% of shifts were covered in the primary care unit of Strabane health centre in the last year. That means that 76% were left unattended, with no notice. People travel from Castlederg to go to the health centre in Strabane, hoping to be seen and to receive vital medical treatment for their child, who cannot speak for themselves, and to understand what is wrong, and they are told, "You'll have to go to Derry. We have no doctor here". That is all the result of the shortage in funding but also, more importantly, in my opinion, how we manage Western Urgent Care and others with the funding and resources that they are granted.

I want to comment on our infrastructure budget and deficit. Recent reports state that the combined depth of potholes here is eight times that of the English Channel. There is a stark figure for you: eight times that of the English Channel. We have seen millions of pounds wasted on claims due to damage to vehicles from potholes. We really need to get

our infrastructure budget right. Again, that is not an easy task, given some of the tremendous pressures that exist in that Department. As has been mentioned by various Members today, a lot of the issues that will affect our economy are to do with infrastructure.

I want to see the full delivery — I will say it as clearly as I can — of the A5 western transport corridor scheme. I know that it was a commitment of previous Executives to see the delivery of the A5. I do not want to see a quarter of the A5. I do not want to drive on a nice road from Derry to Strabane, then struggle to get from Strabane to Omagh and then have another nice road from Omagh to Ballygawley; I want to see the full completion of that A5. In more recent weeks, a public inquiry has been ongoing in relation to the A5. I will attend that public inquiry next week and echo, as strongly as I do in the Chamber and to the Minister and officials, how important that road is for the north-west of the Province to increase connectivity, bring about investment and save countless lives.

I avoided the A5 this morning because it gets congested between Omagh and Strabane on the Omagh section. It takes me 45 minutes to get through Omagh if I hit it at the wrong time. I took an alternative route, and, in so doing, I ended up hitting black ice and going off the road. There is no option for people who live in West Tyrone. Luckily, I lived to tell the tale; I got the car pulled in — eventually. That is the reality for people travelling on that road. Regardless of which stretch, corner or section of the A5 that you go on, you literally take your life in your hands. The latest figures available, which are from 2014 to 2018, show that 18 lives have been lost — I said 15 earlier — on that road since 2014. Since 2006, 34 lives have been lost. Anybody who has had the pleasure of visiting the beautiful constituency of West Tyrone will have noticed that the infrastructure is absolutely disgraceful. It is non-existent. We have beautiful views, but we have very dangerous roads.

Mr O'Toole: I thank the Member for giving way. When he is talking about the A5 and the infrastructure in the north-west of Ireland, I invite him to reflect on the potential for joining up the north-west with not just other parts of Northern Ireland but the rest of the island. Probably the best and fastest way to improve economic performance is through developing the all-island economy.

Mr McCrossan: It will be absolutely pivotal to the all-Ireland economy and to creating greater connectivity across the island.

I had friends over from England recently. They were looking at a map of the old rail system, and they said, "What's that big patch up there?". I said, "You're standing in it". They could not believe it. They said, "Does no one know you exist down here, or have they deliberately turned a blind eye?". That is something that I will leave you all to think about.

The A5 — I say this without any hesitation or doubt — is the most dangerous road on this island; in fact, I go further; it is the most dangerous on these islands. People have lost their loved ones because of continued delays to the scheme. A minority group — a handful of self-interested people — have taken it on themselves to derail a project that is supported by the majority of people across the island. Unfortunately, to date, they have succeeded in continually derailing it. They make their excuses as to why they feel so strongly about it, but it is down to complete

and utter self-interest. They have cost the taxpayer tens if not hundreds of millions with their continued petty objections that have put that project where it is today at a cost that has put the House under significant pressure.

Mr Beggs rightly asked about the commitment of the Irish Government — some £400 million in previous times. I call on any Irish Government — particularly the future one, whoever that may be — to recommit that money to the infrastructure that will unite this island in the interests of our economy and the safety of our people. Removing that funding, which they have done twice, has put these institutions and the Department under financial pressure.

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCrossan: Yes.

Mr Buckley: I recognise what the Member has said in relation to the A5, but it would be remiss of me to not put on record my grave concerns in relation to the A1. Since 1998 — the Minister will be aware of this, because it goes through both of our constituencies — it has claimed over 60 lives.

Mr McCrossan: Absolutely. There is an issue with infrastructure across the entire Province. There was an old saying years ago that, if you went to Donegal, you needed to watch for potholes; in Donegal now, they are saying, "If you go to Strabane, you need to watch the potholes". There is a huge issue with the infrastructure of this place, and there is a desperate need for full and proper investment. I close off my remarks on the A5 by saying that it is important that the House is united in ensuring that we have proper infrastructure that links the entire Province and, more importantly, this island. It takes me two and a half hours to get here every day and two and a half hours to get back.

In terms of capital budget, I want to see the House do more to extend rail services. That is a discussion that we really need to get into. Yes, some say, "There's no money, Daniel. There's no point in discussing rail. We can't have a halt at the International Airport. We've no money". What is wrong with having a bit of ambition and a bit of vision for this place to properly connect the island and get some buy-in? Regardless of the political disagreements around the House, this place finds itself in a unique situation. We have the Assembly and these institutions and our budgets; we could have buy-in from the British Government, who are very keen to build bridges at £20 billion or more; and we have the Irish Government. We also had Europe. We had European funding that was key to this place. It was key to my constituency in Omagh, when it was blown to bits and people were killed in the streets. We had a situation where we could attract funding from a wide range of places. The difficulty is that we are so focused in the House on taking chunks out of each other and finding reasons to not work with each other that we cannot see past our own agendas.

I also want to use the debate to raise issues concerning rural communities, especially those in West Tyrone. I start with some positive news on Project Stratum. I had an answer from the Minister, and I thank him for providing it. It will serve 10,000 homes in my constituency, which is a significant investment that has been a long time coming to address the deficit in broadband provision. I would be walking up the streets in West Tyrone, and one side of the street would have broadband and the other side

would not. It is an unbelievable situation, but let us be honest about where rural communities are today. They have been stripped. Post offices have been closed. Rural banks are gone. Schools are closing. The heart has been ripped out of rural communities. I have a large rural constituency. You can see the damage that has been caused to rural communities by a lack of investment, a lack of responsibility from the Executive. People in rural communities feel neglected, and anyone who represents a rural community will argue the same point as I am making here and will continue to make. I sincerely hope, if I am in the House in 10 years' time, that I am not making the same arguments. We need to address the blatant inequality that exists in the west of the Province. For too long, eyes have been closed, mouths have been shut and no action has been taken. That needs to change, and there needs to be some meaningful investment in rural communities, particularly in mine of West Tyrone.

Members will be glad to hear that I am nearly done. Nothing epitomises the blatant inequality more than the recent floods that brought devastation right through the very heart of my constituency in 2017. The rain came and flooded houses, businesses, community facilities and farms and destroyed livelihoods. I put on record, because this is the only opportunity that I have had to do so, that the services provided by Roads Service and Rivers Agency were exceptional. They were there, supporting people on the ground. They were helping people throughout the constituency and in other areas that were impacted. When I went to knock on the door of the permanent secretary, he welcomed me in with open arms and said, "Daniel, have a seat", and we had cups of coffee and all the rest. First, he told me that they would look at the cost of the damage caused and would brief me and fellow Members from the neighbouring constituency and others on the level of devastation. However, "Oh no. Hush, hush. Do not say anything. Sure it is way down there, not in Belfast. Who cares?". That is what people think. Well, it is not happening any more. If I have to jump up and down, shout and scream, people will hear the voices of the people of my constituency, and they will hear that they have been neglected and abandoned.

That was a crisis. There was no Minister in place because Members in this place could not agree with each other. There was no leadership in the Department to actually give some form of help to those farmers, who have spent tens of thousands restoring their land. Homeowners were out of their homes, and, thankfully, from Derry City and Strabane District Council and other councils, through the Department, there was £1,000 for homeowners, but there was very little for businesses. There was very little granted for the farms and the farmer. I stood and watched a grown man who had farmed for 40 years in tears in his field, and he asked, "Where is the funding?". I had asked the Finance Minister whether there had been any approach from the AERA Minister to grant any funding for farmers in the wake of the crisis that they are continually going through.

I will make a point for comparison. Unfortunately, Primark went on fire in Belfast city centre. It destroyed the city centre and caused all sorts of chaos, and it was a very regrettable situation. However, five or six hours after that happened, there was a statement of some sort released by the head of the Civil Service rounding up the Departments and saying, "We're going to do something about this. We're going to save Belfast". Straight away, much as I was

absolutely horrified by the scenes in Belfast, I was going, "Where on earth was that when my constituency was under water, when I watched a woman who couldn't get into her house and the water was touching the ceiling of her kitchen?".

Where was the leadership then? I got excuses such as, "There is no Minister, Mr McCrossan. We have no money. We cannot grant it, Mr McCrossan". That is the issue. It is not all about Belfast. There needs to be proper budgeted funding for rural communities and for the west of the Province, and it needs to happen soon. People feel that they have been abandoned. People feel that it is discrimination, regardless of what community they are from. They are united in that feeling in my constituency.

I am hopeful that Minister Poots, who, I know, recognises the severity of the issue, will grant the funding, and I hope that the Finance Minister will also support him in that. The imagery does not do it justice. I was in the water for days supporting those farmers, and I am sure that other Members did the same.

8.15 pm

Brexit is still a major threat to many farmers and businesses in West Tyrone, with many people left in a state of limbo, unable to plan for the future and afraid of how their livelihoods will be impacted. I urge each and every Member to come together and oppose any trade restrictions or tariffs that will not only impact rural communities but impact all 18 constituencies here, this entire island, our all-island economy. That needs to be a priority for the Executive.

I will finish with this point. We talk in the House about shortfalls, and it is very depressing, after having some hope that the Assembly was back, that we were going to resolve the teachers' issue, the nurses' issue, the Civil Service issue, the flooding issue. I even had visions of the A5 and driving on it. To hear the Finance Minister come out and say that there is a £600 million shortfall raises questions about how this place has been run for many years prior to its collapse and since.

When you consider the cost of corruption, the cost of scandal, the cost of complete and utter political ignorance, to take responsibility for the looseness, the recklessness and the abuse with which public funds have been mistreated in this place for years. I heard a Member across the House say, "The SDLP left the Executive. The Ulster Unionists walked out as well". We left that Executive because there was a big cake and it was cut down the middle, and, if we were lucky, we got the crumbs off the plate.

When it comes to funding and budgeting in the House, we need to be conscious of the fact that we are the worst possible example of how we spend and account for public money. I will list wastage of public funds, why we are in this Budget situation and why it could have been avoided. RHI: Mr Carroll rightly points out that we burned the shortfall as people stood silent, knowing full well that, in poultry sheds across this place, the heat was blazing and the money was burning. Red Sky: do not mention that; it is in the past; it is another blatant example of where money and public funds have been wasted and why we are in this situation. Research Services Ireland: that has not been mentioned in a while. NAMA.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Just one moment, please. Will the Member come back to the contemporary situation, which is the Budget Bill over the last 12 months and the incoming Budget Bill, please?

Mr McCrossan: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am providing context as to why we find ourselves in this financial situation.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Sorry; my advice is to continue in the context of the Budget Bill, please.

Mr McCrossan: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for your patience. I am due to bring my speech to an end, but what I will say is: let us learn from the past. Let us learn from the failure of this place to properly account for public money so that we do not find ourselves in such deficits, and we do not find ourselves scratching now for £600 million to pay the people who kept this place going, kept our children educated, kept our people in care and safe. That is where the priority should be.

Mr McNulty: Four years an MLA — four years — and this is the first time that I have been able to debate a Budget Bill, even if it is a backwards Budget or, if you like, a retro-Budget. Why? It has been said that, for three years, the voice of the people has not been heard in this place as part of the Budget-making process. Now that we are all back doing what we are supposed to be doing, I want a Budget for this year and the years ahead that reflects the needs and priorities of the community. Public services are stretched in every direction. They need more financial capital and more physical and human resources, be that in doctors' surgeries; school classrooms; hospital wards; or road, rail or waste water infrastructure. Services need to be modernised, reformed and transformed. To do that, they need financial resources. Continuing to do what we have always done just will not cut it any more.

Future projects must strike a balance between doing what we must do, what we want to do and what we need to do strategically. We need to plan and build for the future. We need to build a society that cares for people from the cradle to the grave through its hospital services, childcare, education, training, job creation and care for the elderly. We need to build an infrastructure that supports modern life with affordable quality homes; sport, recreation and leisure facilities; road, rail and waste water infrastructure; and the broadband and telecommunications infrastructure to meet contemporary and future demands.

As I speak in the Chamber, three pupils from the North have self-isolated, and some schools, I believe, have been quarantined. As the world endeavours to cope with the coronavirus, we need to ensure that the region and island are prepared. We need to take all possible steps to prevent an outbreak here. If it does come, we need to deal with it. Yes, it could become a public health emergency, in that such an event could impact on every aspect of life, from schools to workplaces to public services and the general public. Is there money in the Budget to deal with a major public health emergency?

I want a number of key areas to be progressed in future budgetary processes. On infrastructure, I want a Budget that prioritises the provision of an hourly Enterprise service between Belfast and Dublin. This is a small island, yet if you live in Newry or south Armagh and work in Dublin, you struggle to get to Dublin by train in time for work each morning with a reasonable departure time and journey

duration. It is the same from Newry to Belfast. I also want the A1 project to be completed without delay so that the safety issues are addressed and not one more life is lost. We need to focus spend on infrastructure projects that will grow the all-Ireland economy. It is in everyone's interests, whether nationalist or unionist, to grow the all-Ireland economy.

The green eco-warrior in me wants massive expansion of the rail network across the island, particularly in the North, as we seek to move people from their cars to public transport. Reopening the Armagh to Portadown rail link should also be explored. I also want to see the development of greenways that connect towns, cities and, more importantly, communities. I want an improved waste water infrastructure so that we can not only protect the environment and waterways but unlock the building of the new homes and properties that people and the economy need in order to flourish.

As a constituency representative, I want the east link and west link roads in Armagh to be developed. I want the southern relief road in Newry and the Narrow Water bridge project to be progressed and developed. I want the Executive to support important, exciting projects like a city park at the Albert Basin in Newry; a hotel in the old, historic jail in Armagh; and the completion of the new, exciting and innovative multisport and leisure village in Armagh city. As a Gael, I want the much-promised and discussed redevelopment of Casement Park to materialise at long last. Planning must be granted and money must follow. The redevelopment of Casement is about more than just the construction of a sports stadium. It is about respecting a cultural and sporting tradition, investing in an area of social need, promoting sport, health and well-being, building a hub for community endeavour and creating an iconic beacon of hope in the heart of west Belfast. It is time to get Casement done.

To finish on a lighter note, I may need to give further consideration to the Budget in light of the confirmation I received today from the head of the marine and fisheries group that County Armagh does, indeed, have a coastline.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I thank those Members, including Committee Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, who spoke — by my last count there were 29 — in the debate. It has been very useful to me, as a Finance Minister, to hear the views of the respective Committee members on the important financial and economic issues that face us as an Administration.

Many of the points raised were the specific remit of other Departments, so I will not assume to respond to matters of priority or policy on their behalf. I intend to note down the issues and respond to those that are relevant to the Bill or, indeed, to my own Department and responsibilities. I will now endeavour to respond to as many points as possible in the closing moments of the debate when they relate to the Budget Bill.

I remind Members that there will be an opportunity for a full debate on the 2021 Budget when it comes before the Assembly in March. Again, and I made this point yesterday, a number of Members perhaps misunderstood the purpose of the Vote on Account in particular and think that they are actually setting next year's Budget. I refer to, I think, Colin McGrath and Rachel Woods, who made that mistake, and to Gerry Carroll, who is more than entitled

to hold everyone to account, and I look forward to seeing him hold everybody to account, but he is fighting the wrong battle on this one. This Bill is actually approving spend that has already happened, not spend that is yet to come. Let us have the fight on the right issues, and I will be more than happy to hear from him on those.

Members should not confuse the Vote on Account with the setting of the 2021 Budget. The Vote on Account document will always be a high-level document. It is simply the mechanism that allows Departments to incur expenditure for the incoming financial year in advance of the Main Estimates being brought forward following the setting of a Budget for that year, and that Budget and the Main Estimates will be debated in detail in the time ahead.

I will bring the Budget for 2021 to the House in late March, when there will be a full debate on those proposals. The detail of all the 2021 allocations in that Budget and the services they will be used to deliver will be in the 2021 Main Estimates, which I will bring to the Assembly in, I think, June this year. That will be the opportunity for all Members and Committees to fully consider and debate in the Assembly the detail of these spending proposals. We cannot take a time machine and go back to the start of this year when we were not here and be held to account for the spending propositions that lasted right up until 11 January this year. Only the Main Estimates will authorise these detailed expenditure plans, not the high-level Vote on Account, which we are looking at today.

A number of Members also commented on the level of consultation about the Budget Bill and the need for accelerated passage for it. I give my assurances that we will have proper consultation going forward. The Budget Bill, however, will always need to be taken through the Assembly by accelerated passage as it must always be written into the Executive's most up-to-date spending plans. The specific Standing Order was put in place to allow that.

The point is that, in a normal year, the Assembly would have been fully involved in all the financial decisions that have taken place in arriving at the public expenditure position for which the Budget Bill has been written, including the setting of the opening Budget prior to the start of the financial year and all the monitoring rounds that take place during the year and that result in the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Budget Bill. That, obviously, has not been possible this year as the Assembly was not sitting for the majority of the year, but it will be the case for future Budget Bills.

Mr Frew and others raised the financial process generally. Matthew O'Toole referred to it, as did Roy Beggs, who recalled my period as Chair of the Finance Committee, when we put a proposition to the Department about getting a more transparent and clear financial process that involves the Budget Bills and all the associated resolutions that go with them. There is the memorandum of understanding, and the Budget process between the Executive and the Assembly. I confirm that I have asked my officials to engage with the Committee, and I am supportive of anything that enhances transparency and scrutiny in the Budget process.

Any memorandum must be sufficiently flexible to work practically in the various circumstances that impact on the Budget process. It is also important to state that it would

be for the Executive, not just me, to agree a memorandum of understanding.

8.30 pm

Mr Muir raised multi-year budgeting and general engagement on the Budget and sought assurances that those processes would be followed. Our Budget process is restricted by the Budget envelope set by the British Treasury. It is anticipated that the spending review that will be announced later this year will set a multi-year Budget envelope. The Executive will look to set a multi-year Budget from 2021-22 and beyond, following the spending review, with an associated consultation process.

Other issues that were raised could be categorised as "departmental responsibilities", "constituency desires", if I could put it that way, and, for a few, "Somebody should do something about that". A few Members managed to argue for financial prudence and, in the next breath, go on to tell us about all the money that we should spend on projects that are dear to them. Nonetheless, that is understandable. This is the first chance in a number of years that Members have had to make comments in relation to their constituency and spending plans for it. I accept that, across the Six Counties, the local press will be busy over the next number of weeks with a variety of statements.

Mr Frew made the point that we could not ask for more money unless we could demonstrate that we are reforming. As a matter of fact, the core of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document is money to invest in the reform of the health, education and justice systems and in reform generally. Asking for finances to produce a better outcome is a legitimate exercise. You will not achieve that better outcome unless you invest in reform.

I enjoy the odd joust with Mike Nesbitt. He characterises it as us kicking the ball to one another from the full back position in rugby. He raised a number of issues. I took issue with him raising the North/South Ministerial Council because, although it was the only institution that he mentioned, a number of the institutions were in cold storage over the last three years. I accept his argument that he has been fully supportive of it, and I look forward to it getting up and working fully, because the benefits from it can be very important, particularly against the backdrop of Brexit and the protocol processes that need to be worked through. It will be invaluable also in securing the financial commitments that the Irish Government made to certain projects here in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document.

Interestingly, the Member outlined his family history. As people were indulged in expanding in the Budget debate, I might be indulged in responding to them. My grandfather happened to be in jail in the Curragh in Kildare when the civil war ended. The first experience that he had of this state, which was formed in his absence, was an exclusion notice from the Home Secretary, Dawson Bates, that hangs on my wall here, up the stairs. He was not allowed to return home to his family, to his business or to his farm. My father's shop was the victim of an abandoned car bomb in Monaghan Street in Newry. It destroyed his business, which was paying to rear nine of us at the time. I do not think that I would have ended up in that business anyway, to be honest. However, it is remarkable that, even though our politics differ, we come from similar historical experiences. I take issue with his remark that I do not want him here and I do

not want to hear his voice. I have known him for a long time. I respect very much what he has to say, and I would defend his right to be here and to have his voice heard in this institution or any future one, regardless of the constitutional situation. I wanted to make that clear to him.

Mr Nesbitt referred to the pressures on the Executive Office budget in relation to HIA and victims' redress. Obviously, the Executive Office leads on that. It faces a pressure that is beyond the normal budgetary ask. A number of other Members raised the issue of who pays. The final budget will be a matter for the Executive. Engaging with the bodies associated with institutional abuse to secure a contribution is the responsibility of the Executive Office. It is not a Department of Finance matter, but, as he said, those cases are all strong reasons why Westminster needs to step up. As yet, the NIO has not responded to the correspondence my officials sent to it about these matters last October. Very simply, the Treasury's statement on funding policy states that the body whose decision leads to the additional costs will meet that cost. That is in relation to the victims' issue as well.

I move on to some of the other matters raised. Paul Givan, who is no longer in the Chamber, raised the financial cost of Brexit. Money has already been allocated by the Treasury to various Departments here in relation to the financial cost of Brexit to date. That principle is established: additional costs that accrue to us are met by the Treasury. As I said in response to other issues relating to EU funding and the continuation of EU funding — that might have been in Question Time; I have been here so long I am mixing up my sequences — the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers and I intend to meet the Treasury in the near future to press the case on all of that.

I welcome the maiden speech of Paul Givan's colleague Jonathan Buckley. He made an impassioned plea on a range of issues, including his constituency. We have always welcomed the confidence-and-supply money. We did not welcome the product that it came from, but any more money that comes for services here is welcome. We said that publicly and privately to the DUP at the time. The point I made yesterday is that the pickle we have got ourselves into in relation to the promised money that was suddenly cut off is due, in no small terms, to the behaviour of his colleagues in Westminster and the fact that, once that arrangement ended, they were quickly dropped by the British Government. That left a very abrupt spending headache, particularly in relation to the broadband issue, which has been out for contract, but also money in relation to mental health and deprivation. That is why I make no bones about continuing to pursue that issue.

I made the same point as Matthew O'Toole made — I am not sure if it was in this debate — about "Budget Bill" being a misnomer; it is actually a Bill to approve money that has already been spent. As I said in response to Roy Beggs and Paul Frew, I am happy to look at the processes in relation to that; I am happy to do work with the Committee. There is a body of work from a previous Committee, as Roy Beggs mentioned, that we did back in 2012 when we were trying to make the processes more understandable, more straightforward and more transparent. I am happy to continue that work.

The Member referred to capital being handed back. I think another Member made reference to that as well, but I am not certain who it was. I think it was Kellie Armstrong,

actually, who referred to capital being handed back to the Treasury. We have not handed capital funding back to the Treasury. I think Members might be referring to the financial transactions capital, which has been available to us but we have not been able to access, largely due to the Housing Executive designation piece that was supposed to be done in Westminster during the year. The transactions capital was available to us on the back of that being done, but it did not happen because the legislative timetable at Westminster did not allow it. Consequently, that money had to be handed back. The Department for Communities is adamant that it will bring forward that legislation very quickly. In the year ahead, we want to work with other Departments that have not been able to access that money, which is an important resource to us, if it can be accessed, to make sure that that is addressed properly.

I am skipping through some of the issues, but John Blair made a point in relation to the Executive and how they function across Departments. The Executive have had a number of away discussions, and I am impressed by the willingness and enthusiasm of Departments and Ministers to work together to get better outcomes. There is a recognition of the difficult financial circumstances we find ourselves in, and, even if we can get an improvement on that, we will still be in difficult and challenging financial circumstances. Of course, my argument is that the co-design and co-production principle that has been used to apply to health should apply across the board. That includes the Departments working together, but it also includes the Departments engaging with all of the sectors that we have responsibility for. All of the answers are not to be found in this institution or even in the Civil Service. The answers to many of the problems that we face are out there among the people working on the ground. If we can apply that principle in health, I would be a firm advocate of applying it across the board.

Mr Blair also asked about increased policing. That will be a consequence of a bid from the Department of Justice. I have met the Justice Minister, and I know that she is working through some of the issues in relation to it.

Mervyn Storey, who is no longer with us, referred to objective need. Of course, if we agreed on what is objective need, it would be subjective need, because we would have had to agree it between ourselves. We rely, instead, on NISRA and other people who provide statistics, so we do not need to debate objective need any more. The process is already there for doing that.

Pat Catney raised issues about procurement and prompt payment. Of course, I will chair the Procurement Board from here on, and we will raise some of those issues and look at how we can continue to improve on the way that procurement is done.

Sinéad Bradley raised issues about health budget flexibility to do with contingency funding for dealing with the coronavirus. The Department of Health's ambit is sufficiently flexible to cover any expenditure required to deal with a coronavirus outbreak. There is funding provided at a UK level for coronavirus, and the Executive will receive their Barnett consequential of any funding that is needed.

Roy Beggs raised the issue of Casement Park, and, of course, others have answered him. The cost was as a consequence of a planning hold-up, and that pushed it up

to an estimated £112 million. Increased costs are attributed to construction inflation as a result of delay and the necessary revision of the design of the stadium following a public consultation. Any request to increase the project budget will be considered by the Minister for Communities and the Executive. This is capital funding, so it cannot be used to fund resource issues as well. I am sure that the Member understands that.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. Given the principal reasons he has set out that might contribute to increased costs for the regional stadium funding for Casement Park, does that mean that the Minister and the Communities Minister are likely to consider increased funding for the subregional soccer stadia fund as well, given the undue delay that has incurred on that programme?

Mr Murphy: I am not sure; I do not know the detail. I know from the subregional stadia process that I have been following in my constituency that clubs have submitted and costed plans and have been in the process of awarding contracts, but they have been held up due to planning issues beyond their control, and that has pushed the timeline on and the price up. I do not whether that situation applies at the subregional funding level, but I am sure that the Department and the Minister for Communities will consider that matter in the time ahead.

Jim Allister asked a number of questions about the Bill under consideration. He asked why we do not vote on capital investment in the Budget and the corresponding Estimates. We do not vote on one-off capital investment when new assets are created because, instead, we vote on the annual depreciation costs, which reflect how those assets are used over a full economic life. To simply add the resource and capital figures together and arrive at a single larger figure would be to do a double-count and would be misleading. The Assembly votes the cash that is used to fund the capital investment, and that is included in the cash figures in the Budget Bill.

Mr Allister also asked, quite rightly, questions about the sole authority of the Budget Act being used for much more substantial costs than is normally the case in black-box issues. The total expenditure that has been black-boxed in the spring Supplementary Estimates for 2019-2020 comes to £1.114 billion. That is obviously a significant sum and is ahead of what is normally the case. Of that, £1.078 billion is for the creation of provisions in the Executive Office and the Department of Justice for future liabilities as a result of the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board, the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse and the victims' payment scheme. He referred to both those projects. A provision such as that must be recognised in the Department's accounts when there is a potential future liability but there is uncertainty about how much, if any, will end up being paid and about when the costs will materialise. Because there may be future liabilities for either TEO or DOJ or a combination of both, it is necessary for both Departments to be able to make provision for those potential future liabilities, so they are included in the sums. It may fall to one Department; it may fall to the other. It may fall to a combination of both, or it may fall to neither. The sums have to be included in order to give cover, if such a thing is required.

Although the enabling primary legislation for some of the schemes for historical abuse and other victims has

been taken through Westminster, there are some further secondary powers that the Assembly must enact to switch those powers on.

Dr Aiken: Will the Minister give way?

8.45 pm

Mr Murphy: I am sorry; I want to finish my point. The creation of that provision does not constitute payments being made; it is simply about Departments recognising that they may have future liability as a result of the commitments that have been made to the victims. Nor does it in any way predetermine where funding for that expenditure will come from when the time comes to make the payments. Of course, the Member understands that we continue to make the argument with the British Government and the NIO that they legislated for it and they own it, and, therefore, they should provide the funding, even if the payments come through TEO or the Department of Justice or a combination of both.

The Member is correct that the amount of expenditure that is being authorised on the sole authority of the Budget Bill is greater than would normally be the case. That is in large part because the Assembly has not been sitting and has not been in a position to pass legislation. I am confident that Ministers will now bring that legislation forward for the Assembly and that we will not be in this position in future.

I will give way to Mr Aiken.

Dr Aiken: I thank the Minister for that. For Members' clarification: does that mean that, when we are looking at black boxes, we are double-accounting between two Departments?

Mr Murphy: It means, as I said, that there is no certainty yet as to whether either Department, a combination of both Departments or neither of them will pick up the tab, but they have to provide some legislative cover for the Estimates, should that be the case. It is simply a matter of providing cover if expenditure is required to happen. That is yet to be resolved, and there is further legislation to be passed here to switch on those powers, but the question of who is ultimately responsible for the funding has yet to be agreed. Should it fall, at the end of this process, that TEO accepts responsibility, then it needs cover. If it falls to the Department of Justice, it will need to do that. That does not mean that the expenditure is actually incurred, but it is covered in the Estimates.

Dr Aiken: Just for the sake of clarity: would it not be better if it was in one Department rather than two?

Mr Murphy: Further legislation has to happen, and we cannot ascertain where that might go. There are further conversations to be had with the British Government as to which Department may have responsibility. We need to bear in mind that there are two sets of issues here: the historical inquiries and the victims' payments. There is no certainty as to whether both or either would fall into either Department, so it is about providing a degree of cover for both or for any scenario that might flow from all of that.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way. He has been generous with his time. I do not need the answer today, but are there other examples in the document that has been provided of where there is a double-accountancy issue? It could well be sprinkled across the document, or it may

not be, apart from this one issue. Just for the House's clarification, it would be good to know that.

Mr Murphy: I know that, because of the nature of this and, as we discussed, the estimates that try to predict what the cost might be, this is substantially above and beyond what would normally appear in black-box-associated expenditure. *[Interruption.]* I am told that there are no other examples of that, and that it was done on legal advice in order to ensure that it could be covered. It might be best to get officials to come to the Committee to have a specific engagement on that.

The overarching principle that we are dealing with here, in the Budget process that we are in, and given some of the issues that face us, is that we will be back here in five weeks' time. In the space of a couple of weeks, we are trying to regulate and get on top of a lot of issues that have transpired over the last number of years. That has to be done before the end of this financial year, and we have to make provision for next year, and that is the overarching context. A lot of the things that will emerge from this process, and which will emerge from other Departments, will be unusual in the normal circumstances. Obviously, the intention is to get back to more normal ways of doing things in the time ahead, but we have to give cover where that is required.

Jim Allister also asked about the review of financial process. The previous Executive agreed to progress a review of financial process, but, unfortunately, there was no time to update the Assembly because it crashed before that came through. My Department's officials have continued to progress that work and will engage with the Finance Committee in the coming weeks. I will be in a position to bring an update to the Executive and the House on that matter in due course, so the work carries on.

The Member made a point, which I noted but have not got a reply to, about the Department for the Economy and Northern Ireland Screen. I will ask officials to provide some written information for him on all of that.

Daniel McCrossan asked about Civil Service pay. We recognise the job that civil servants and other public servants have done. That is why there is an attempt to ensure that pay issues in relation to all public servants are resolved as quickly and as satisfactorily as possible. There have been ongoing discussions about the Civil Service pay issue between my departmental officials and NIPSA, which represents a substantial number of civil servants. I hope that that will conclude in the very near future with an acceptable outcome for everybody.

I am sure that people would like to stay on and debate these issues for the rest of the night, but some of us have lives, so I will draw my remarks to a close. I have tried to respond to as many as possible of the relevant issues that were raised that relate specifically to the Bill. A number of other points — Members were entitled to make them — related to future spend, future Budgets and departmental issues. I am sure that they will continue to raise those in their Committees. A number of points related to constituency issues, and I am sure that they will continue to raise those with the relevant Departments.

The debate was lively, many significant points were raised, and I am thankful to Members for that. It is imperative that this legislation continues its passage through the

Assembly so that public services can be delivered without delay or interruption.

I ask Members to support the Bill, thereby authorising spending on public services by Departments in 2019-2020 and into the early months of the 2020-21 financial year in the Vote on Account.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Before we proceed to the Question, I advise Members that, as this is a Budget Bill, it requires cross-community support.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 42; Noes 3.

AYES

Nationalist

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Mr Catney, Mr Durkan, Ms Flynn, Ms C Kelly, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGrath, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Toole.

Unionist:

Dr Aiken, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Frew, Mr Harvey, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Mr Lyttle, Mr Muir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Ms Mullan.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister.

Other

Mr Carroll, Miss Woods.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Carroll and Miss Woods.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>[93.3%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>[94.4%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>[66.7%]</i>

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA 2/17-22] be agreed.

Adjourned at 9.08 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 March 2020

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

Inter-ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Mr Speaker: Members, I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs that he wishes to make a statement. Bear with us just for a moment.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am sorry. I nipped out for a glass of water. I did not realise that I was going to be called first.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the meeting of the inter-ministerial group for environment, food and rural affairs that took place on 17 February 2020. The group provides central coordination and promotion of greater collaboration in areas of shared interest between portfolio Ministers who lead on agriculture, fisheries, the environment, forestry and rural affairs in the UK Administrations. The meeting considers policy, delivery, and technical and legislative matters on which the Administrations have determined to engage multilaterally. There are well-established and good working relationships with UK Departments, and my Department continues to ensure that NI issues are recognised and fully understood at UK level to help inform UK-EU negotiations. I therefore welcome the opportunity to update you on the discussions of the meeting that I chaired here in Belfast.

The participating Ministers were: from the UK Government, George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and from the Scottish Government, Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, and Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform. Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, was unfortunately unable to participate because of the floods, so the Welsh Government were represented by Mr Tim Render, the Welsh Government's director of environment and rural affairs.

In preparation for the EU and rest-of-the-world negotiations, DEFRA officials presented a paper that reflected the broad context for trade negotiations in 2020, along with an overarching summary of UK Government trade priorities in EFRA areas, highlighting known devolved Administration priorities. Ministers from each of the Administrations highlighted their priority sectors and issues, noting the risks of not reaching a trade agreement with the EU.

I indicated to the meeting that a deal that consisted of zero tariffs and zero quotas would be highly desirable and highlighted Northern Ireland's unique position in relation to regulatory alignment with the EU. I emphasised the huge and fundamental problems for Northern Ireland agri-food businesses that would be caused by imposing tariffs from GB to NI.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Mr Eustice, recognised the unique Northern Ireland issues in relation to the protocol, east-west trade, tariffs, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) checks and market integrity and agreed that those issues would require a bilateral meeting for further discussion.

I also indicated that it was important to agree the maintenance of a high level of standards in Great Britain to minimise unfair competition from third-country imports that are produced to a lower standard and cost and to build a reputation for the UK as a safe and reputable source of food supply to global markets. In particular, I asked how the UK would protect the integrity of the food industry. I was informed by Mr Eustice that the UK would adopt an intelligence and risk-based approach to import control.

I, along with the Ministers from the other devolved Administrations, emphasised the importance of meaningful engagement in the negotiation of new trade agreements. DEFRA agreed to share documents as early as possible and to encourage other Whitehall Departments to do likewise.

The meeting then considered the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol and agreed a cross-Administration technical work plan to progress that constructively. I raised concerns regarding the significant tariffs that could be incurred by the fishing industry. I also sought clarification on what "unfettered access" to GB would mean for Northern Ireland.

To ensure domestic preparedness for December 2020, the group also agreed to produce a shared set of planning assumptions to prepare for broad scenarios at the end of the transition period and discussed border preparations and business engagement. I emphasised that devolved Administrations need absolute clarity on roles and responsibilities and that confirmation of that should be provided at the next meeting on 23 March 2020.

In closing the meeting, we noted the progress of the DEFRA primary legislation programme and acknowledged the highly ambitious programme of secondary legislation that will be required to ensure a fully functioning statute book by the end of the transition period. Following the meeting, I requested that several bilateral meetings take

place in Belfast in the very near future with Mr Eustice, Mr Ewing and Ms Griffiths to discuss in more detail some of the issues of mutual interest in relation to EU exit, such as the Northern Ireland protocol, tariffs, SPS issues, GB-NI trade, the integrity of the GB market and risk-based surveillance, along with policy in relation to agri-food, environment and fisheries and the operation of the UK internal market.

Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I thank the Minister for his statement. One of the issues that was raised in Committee and on the Floor last week is the importance of migrant labour to the industry here. I note from the DEFRA minutes of the previous meeting, on 13 January, that the Scottish and Welsh Ministers had raised the issue of migrant labour. Given the importance of labour from other countries to the agriculture and food-and-drink industries, will the Minister outline what representations he has made to the British Government on the points-based immigration system that was recently announced by the British Home Office?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. Labour is of key importance to agriculture. We have done some background work, and, as things stand, only around 9% of those who are engaged in the agri-food sector would qualify under the proposed scheme. That indicates that the people who are here would be fine, but there would be a substantial challenge if those people were to leave and we try to bring new people in. Consequently, we have raised this issue with the Executive, and we have also raised it with the relevant Minister, the Business Minister, who was over here. The Executive are going to take this and write to Her Majesty's Government to highlight the concerns that we in Northern Ireland have. It is a particular issue for my Department, and for the Department of Health in providing social care, but much of our agri-food industry is reliant on labour that is sourced from outside the United Kingdom. Consequently, for the continuation of many of our businesses, we need to have the opportunity to source the appropriate labour. We will continue to lobby and press upon that, because I do not see what is proposed as adequately meeting our needs in the agri-food industry.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his statement. Does the Minister have a sense of how the other devolved Administrations will approach future trade agreements?

Mr Poots: The other Administrations and ourselves will all be lobbying the UK Government to get a deal that is best suited to us. The Scottish and Welsh, for example, will be quite concerned about the lamb trade; they are high producers of lamb and export quite a lot of it. Ideally, we will all get a zero-tariff, zero-quota deal, but that is going to be difficult to achieve. My fear going forward is that the level playing field will be the significant issue and the Northern Ireland protocol will be a less significant issue for the UK Government. and, therefore, whatever arrangements come to us will be more about the level playing field and what suits the UK Government on that front and less about the Northern Ireland protocol. That could have a really serious impact for us here in Northern Ireland.

Mr Catney: Thank you, Minister, for that statement. This is important, given the size of our agri-food industry and its impact on our economy. Can the Minister give his assessment of the British Government's commitment to upholding food standards, following the Secretary

of State's comments last week that he would give no assurances about maintaining alignment with safety standards following Brexit?

Mr Poots: I am of the opinion that the United Kingdom has better food standards and will want to have better food standards than many other parts of the European Union. For example, the horsemeat scandal a number of years ago kicked off not in the United Kingdom but in other European countries. I believe that we will have high standards on the environment, animal health, animal welfare and food. The question that has to be asked, and the question that Europe has to recognise, is: do they want equivalence and find equivalence acceptable, or do they want Britain to rigidly adhere to standards set by the European Union?

Going forward, I believe that British standards on food will be high, but they may not be exactly the same as European standards. Consequently, does that open the door for a series of tariffs to be applied that will not be applied to Canada by the European Union? We need a bit of common sense to apply here and not to have some sort of punishment of the UK because Europe does not want it to be seen that the UK has too good a deal as this may be attractive for other countries to exit the European Union.

12.15 pm

Mr M Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that the Northern Ireland protocol places Northern Ireland at a disadvantage in the UK internal market?

Mr Poots: There are around 380,000 HGV movements between Northern Ireland and GB, and GB and NI. Consequently, any new export health checks and movements that are then applied, from GB to NI in particular, will have a detrimental impact. Roughly 50% of our trade goes to Britain and, indeed, comes from Britain. That is very significant because Great Britain is our most important trading partner, so any barriers placed between us and Great Britain will have a greater impact than any barriers elsewhere. The trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is absolutely critical and essential, which is why the proposed protocol is hugely damaging. That is why I welcome the UK Government looking for further changes to the protocol. We were told that it cannot be changed. Well, it needs to be changed because, if it is not changed, there will be a consequence for every business in Northern Ireland, and there will be a consequence for every consumer in Northern Ireland. That will make life harder for our consumers, with higher prices being imposed as a result of the protocol, not as a result of us leaving the European Union.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for his statement. In some of his responses so far, he used the words "worrying", "consequences", "detrimental impact" and "serious concerns"; far away from the sunny uplands of Brexit. In his last statement, he said that the protocol is damaging. I contend that it is Brexit that is damaging. It is Brexit that is causing serious concern to our farmers and our agriculture industry here.

Boris Johnson, in his recent speech in Greenwich, said:

"There is no need for a free trade agreement to involve accepting EU rules on competition policy, subsidies,

social protection, the environment, or anything similar any more than the EU should be obliged to accept UK rules.”

Does the Minister agree that that contradicts paragraph 12 of his statement on the circumstances that Mr Eustice outlined on the protocol?

Mr Poots: The decision on Brexit has been made. We have now left the European Union, so that argument is done and dusted. There is no point in going over that further. It was well enough argued for three years. It is now about our future trading relationships with the European Union. It is in our interests to get the best trading relationships with the European Union. It is in our best interests to get the best trading relationships with our key trading partner — Great Britain.

Leave all the politics to one side. You do not have to like Great Britain. You do not have to like the United Kingdom. You may have a preference to be in a united Ireland. Set all that to one side. Who do we do our business with? Most of our business is done with Great Britain. Anything, therefore, that damages that trade will cause problems for the people who live in Northern Ireland. Consequently, we need to minimise any damage. It is hugely unfortunate that the damage that is being done to Northern Ireland businesses and consumers is being enforced on us by the European Union, which is demanding the following. Consequently, we need to rail back on that. If the European Union is good to its word that Northern Ireland is really important, that peace in Northern Ireland is really important and the people of Northern Ireland are really important, we need it to rail back on creating barriers between Northern Ireland and its number one market for goods.

Mr Givan: I welcome the Minister’s commitment to look forward and to set aside the old debates of the past when it comes to Brexit and the constitutional argument. I appeal to Members, particularly those opposite, to embrace that forward-looking perspective. It would appear to many of us that the protocol is being used as some kind of instrument to inflict a punishment beating on those who supported Brexit. Northern Ireland cannot afford to endure that kind of punishment as a result of the decision that was taken.

Will the Minister reassure me that he will confront the Tánaiste, the Foreign Affairs Minister, Simon Coveney, who is putting in jeopardy the trade talks that are starting today through his insistence on putting infrastructure down the Irish Sea that will create a burden on our trade with GB? Will he give us his assessment of the damage that Simon Coveney is inflicting on us?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. In the infrastructure that is being sought by Simon Coveney, we are looking at tens of thousands of checks on goods coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, which will create a huge pressure on business. Let me explain. Just-in-time food supplies include fresh strawberries and fresh food of any kind. If those have to be delayed at a port, be it in Scotland or Northern Ireland — I should say that neither the Northern Ireland Minister nor, indeed, the Scottish Minister have expressed that they are willing to accept any checks at any ports. Scotland was as firm as I was on that: we would not put infrastructure in our ports to facilitate that. If Mr Coveney had his way, there would be tens of thousands of checks, damaging those just-in-time goods coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. That

would be hugely detrimental to the shops, convenience stores and supermarkets that provide food that has been produced in Great Britain and comes to Northern Ireland. Again, that will have a huge impact on our consumers.

Mr Coveney will also impose on us, as a consequence of his reading of the protocol, huge damage on our fishing industry in that the European Union’s current position is that all fish that are caught in British waters and landed in Northern Ireland would be subject to tariffs. The Union might say, however, “We might be kind and allow you to catch fish that are under quota and tariff the rest”. That is totally unacceptable.

Simon Coveney wants to damage our fishermen. Simon Coveney wants to damage our consumers and our businesses. Simon Coveney could not get a majority in the election just past. He came third. Boris Johnson got an 80-seat majority in the House of Commons. I do not think that Simon Coveney has much clout when it comes to the talks. The clout lies with the UK Government, which will go into the talks to fight and to fight hard to ensure that Northern Ireland is not damaged as a consequence of this protocol.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Ennis: The Minister is speaking about the fishing industry and the tariffs that may be imposed. Will he elaborate on those tariffs and the impact that they could have on our fishing industry, which is already under severe pressure? Will he give us a bit more information about the tariffs that he is proposing?

Mr Poots: I know that the Member will have a particular interest in the issue, given that two of our main fishing ports happen to be in south Down. The fishing industry has been emasculated for the last 40 years as a result of the European Union. Thankfully, I was able to raise a proposal that created the opportunity for fishermen to fish for haddock last week, which they had not been allowed to do as a consequence of the European Union for many years. Nonetheless, they have been emasculated and have been prevented from fishing in their own waters, while fish that they should have been entitled to fish were being caught by boats from other European countries.

We can have a very good relationship with the Republic of Ireland when it comes to fishing. There are plenty of fish in the Irish Sea for Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland fishermen. However, we cannot have a situation in which the European Union comes in and says, “That fish was caught in British waters. We will apply a tariff to it.” That would apply to Irish boats as well. It is wholly unacceptable. Fish caught in the Irish Sea and landed in Kilkeel, Ardglass, Portavogie or Belfast must be tariff free, and we must be enabled to land it tariff free. European Union officials told our officials in DAERA that a tariff will apply. I have impressed upon George Eustice that it is totally unacceptable and we cannot contemplate it.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for coming to the House to give his statement. He referred to food standards. Before I comment on that, I welcome his comments on the fact that, through a democratic process, we have now left the shackles of the European Union, which decimated, as he said, our fisheries and the many other businesses that had draconian rules and regulations imposed on them.

The Member for Lagan Valley mentioned food standards and protecting the importation of foods into Northern

Ireland. Can the Minister ensure that the high standards that we have in Northern Ireland will not be jeopardised by the importation of any foods that fall short of those standards?

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland has food of a very high standard. The chicken and meat that we produce and the fish that we catch is all of an excellent standard. We have much higher standards than many other parts of the world from where cheap imports are available. People in our country, and the people who receive our exports, deserve to know that they are receiving the best quality products; that our animal health is excellent; that we have good environmental conditions; and that the food itself is of top quality. Therefore, it is often the case that people pay a premium for it.

We need to ensure that, in free trade negotiations, that continues to be the case. Origin of food and other labelling is very important. Free trade negotiations may end up with us importing food of a different standard from another country. If people buy it, that is their choice. However, it needs to be up there in lights that it is food that has not been produced to the same high standard as ours. If people want to buy it for a lower price, that is entirely up to them, but they will be buying something that does not meet the same quality standards we currently have.

Mr O'Dowd: As the question-and-answer session flows back and forth, it is clear that Members on the Benches opposite do not want us to talk about Brexit, but we are dealing with the consequences of Brexit and the consequences of those who supported it promising us sunny uplands.

This follows on from Mr Storey's question: is it not the case that the Irish protocol protects us from the very scenario that Mr Storey talks about? I assume that he was talking about the Moy Park workers in his and my constituency who, if our market is opened to the chlorinated chicken previously referred to, face losing their job. Will the Minister confirm that the Irish protocol protects our environment, industries and consumers from low-quality, cheap imports?

Mr Poots: The Member makes a fair point about the chicken that would come here if a free trade deal were done with the United States of America. Chicken there is more subject to salmonella. Consequently, it is chlorinated. I do not see millions of people coming back from America having been badly affected as a consequence of eating it.

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

Nonetheless, we produce our chicken to a higher standard. It does not need to be chlorinated in the first instance. That is why labelling of food origin is absolutely critical, and it is something that I have sought for years. Loads of chicken currently comes into the European Union from south-east Asian countries that produce chicken to a lower standard than ours. Much of it ends up in the catering industry, and it is not well labelled for the people who buy it. Therefore, it already happens. It is not something that will be new; already it is happening. We need to make our argument forcibly. I do not care whether the chicken comes from America, Thailand or elsewhere: we need to identify where it comes from and the standards that it has been raised to so that consumers can choose whether they want to buy locally produced material that is produced to the highest

standards or something of a lower standard for which they will pay a lower price. It is a decision that consumers will make, not us.

12.30 pm

Mr Buckley: I thank the Minister for his statement and for the work that he is doing on matters pertaining to Brexit on behalf of the Assembly and the Executive, in particular his vocal opposition, alongside his devolved colleagues, to barriers and infrastructure at our ports. It is fair to say that we must hold Boris Johnson firm to his commitment of there being unfettered free trade east-west, given the fact that the Assembly voted unanimously against the Brexit Bill when it came before the House.

If the protocol is implemented in full, as the EU would suggest, at what cost would that be to the Northern Ireland agri-food sector?

Mr Poots: We have a circumstance in which Northern Ireland is a leader in food production and food processing. Consequently, food that is produced by primary producers in Great Britain is brought to Northern Ireland for further processing, adding value to that food. Most of it ends up back in Great Britain's supermarkets. We have a situation in which literally thousands of jobs are involved in adding value to food, the primary producer of which is a producer in Great Britain. For example, if the EU were to add a tariff to beef, which currently is around 40%, importers of that product would have to pay the tariff and would not be able to reclaim it until 100% of the beef had left the particular factory. Whenever a beef carcass comes in that large form, it is divided into many other forms. The steaks and the stewed beef and all of that may all go back into the market, but elements of minced beef etc may not have. Until 100% of the carcass goes back into the GB market, the tariff cannot be reclaimed. Consequently, a production system that works to very fine margins would, all of a sudden, have massive tariffs to pay and have to wait many months — maybe more than 12 months in some instances — before they could reclaim the tariff. That would do huge detriment to those businesses. We need to get to a circumstance in which we do not have those tariffs applied in the first instance.

The application of tariffs within a country has not happened anywhere else in the world. It is just unacceptable. We need to press home over and over again the unacceptability of tariffs within a country and tariffs between key trading partners, in this case Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr Harvey: Given the importance of the GB market to our agri-food business, can the Minister detail what discussions he has had on the term "unfettered access"?

Mr Poots: "Unfettered access" is great terminology, but I want to know exactly what the British Government mean by it. "Unfettered access" appears to mean any goods going from Northern Ireland to Great Britain — there is no issue there — but I am not absolutely clear that it is the same for goods coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. I have pressed repeatedly that it has to be the same. Unfettered access cannot be one-way; it has to be a two-way flow, because the consequences of not having that unfettered access, some of which I have laid out, would be damaging to our consumers and our businesses, and we cannot accept that. We cannot have a circumstance

where something that has been imposed on us costs our consumers, many of whom live in areas of deprivation and for many of whom food is one of their biggest spends. As a result of what Leo Varadkar, Simon Coveney and the European Union have sought to impose on us — creating separation and division between Great Britain and Northern Ireland that is damaging to consumers — people in west Belfast, Fermanagh/South Tyrone, South Down, the Member's constituency of Strangford and my constituency of Lagan Valley, many of whom need every penny that they have, will have to spend more.

Mr Stalford: Mr O'Dowd referred to the Benches opposite: now, perhaps, I can. The Minister will agree, I am sure, that unity of approach is important going forward. Given that Sinn Féin opposed entry into the Common Market, opposed the Single European Act, opposed the Maastricht Treaty, opposed the Lisbon Treaty, opposed the Nice Treaty and were on the anti side in every European constitutional referendum in the Republic of Ireland, does the Minister agree that it is time that they returned to their original Eurosceptic principles?

Mr Poots: I would not want the Member to suggest that Sinn Féin is a flip-flop party when it comes to the European Union. That would not be very pleasant of the Member, but, of course, he did not say those words, so we will refrain from that. Nonetheless, over the years, Sinn Féin has reflected that the European Union has not always been about the local worker, the local consumer or local solutions. It is a large, amorphous body that seeks to bring together people from south-east Europe, western Europe and northern Europe, and, often, the circumstances that prevail in all of those places at one time are hugely different. Applying a single solution to places that are hugely different does not always work. That is a major problem for the European Union. The European Union has not always worked for Ireland, be it Ireland North or Ireland South. Folks in Ireland South are beginning to wake up to a reality that they will be forking out, probably, over £2 billion to the European Union, having been a net receiver for many years, and that the tables are being turned on them. It will be interesting to see how they will move forward.

The one thing that Ireland South needs to be concerned about is its trade with Great Britain, because Great Britain takes huge amounts, particularly of its food product, from the Republic of Ireland. Irrespective of all of the growth that is taking place in the Republic of Ireland, the food industry is still crucial to its economy. I want to see a sensible arrangement between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and between Northern Ireland and the Republic. The protocol does not deliver, and, therefore, we will argue with the United Kingdom Government that there needs to be changes — substantial changes. That will be in the best interests of consumers here, and I hope that we will do something that will be in the best interests of the people of the Republic of Ireland. I do not believe that the outgoing Government in the Republic of Ireland served the best interests of their community in their negotiations. We could have had and should have had a circumstance in which the Republic of Ireland had very favourable trading conditions with Great Britain and Northern Ireland had very favourable trading conditions as well, but that opportunity was thrown away by the outgoing Government.

Mr Allister: I welcome the Minister's firm declaration that he will not accept any infrastructure at our ports and look forward to him holding to that. In consequence, he was right to call out Simon Coveney in respect of what he has been saying. In that vein, does he not also need to call out three of the parties that he shares the Executive with? The Alliance Party, Sinn Féin and the SDLP have all been adamant that the protocol must be fully enforced and implemented, so do they too not need to be called out for seeking to damage the economy of Northern Ireland?

In that context, can he explain a little more the paragraph of his statement where he said that there will be:

"a cross-Administration technical work plan to progress"

the protocol? What does that mean:

"a ... technical work plan to progress"

the protocol? Is that taking us in a direction that he does not want to go? How can he ensure that it will not do so?

Mr Poots: Of course, people have a democratic right to express a political position. The three parties that the Member named are pro-Remain parties, and it is their absolute right to be pro-Remain parties. I am in a pro-Leave party. In due course, when all this is done and dusted, we will all know who was right and who was wrong and whether we have a successful economy. I think that we can have a much more successful economy; others may think differently. Time will tell. Even within some of the parties, we have had a difference of opinion. In the Assembly, Sinn Féin voted against it, whereas, in the European Union assembly, Sinn Féin voted for it. We had that little dichotomy in Sinn Féin's voting positions when it came to the deal that was put forward.

On the Member's question, the protocol is a reality as things stand. We want to see the necessary changes applied to it. That will be part of the discussion that takes place between the member states of the United Kingdom. We will look for changes to the protocol and will be part of the course of work that the Member refers to.

Mrs Barton: Is it likely, if trade deals are agreed by the UK for the import of agri-food products from countries with lower quality standards, that those deals will include a requirement for Northern Ireland to be part of them?

Mr Poots: They will, yes, because, in the current circumstance, we are part of the single market, but we are also part of the UK customs arrangements, so we are in a slightly different position from everybody else. Some elements of that give us an advantage. Having the ability to sell with zero tariffs to both the EU and the UK gives us an advantage, even in terms of businesses that wish to settle in Northern Ireland. We also have disadvantages, because there is the potential for tariffs between us and our main trading partner. We need to try to take advantage of the advantages and reduce the disadvantages. That is a course of work that we will do.

If the UK agrees to acquire food from various countries as part of a free trade arrangement, Northern Ireland will be part of that. After all, we produce about five times as much food as we eat and the majority of that ends up in Great Britain, so it is absolutely critical that, irrespective of whether that food is coming to Northern Ireland or Great Britain, labelling of the food's origin is done in a very good

way. The United States of America is probably one of the best countries at labelling foods. That will be less of an issue when it comes to having that discussion, because it is good at labelling food. It is absolutely critical that consumers know what they are getting, know what they are paying for and are satisfied to be acquiring that product.

12.45 pm

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for the statement and the information that it provides. However, some of the outflow from the statement and the toing and froing here compels me to say — I hope that he will forgive me for not resisting the temptation — that never has there been less temptation or opportunity for an “I told you so” moment. The Minister and others will be aware that some of us did not want the uncertainty. Some of us did not envisage the prospect of a cliff edge but — the Minister referenced it — the protocol is an international agreement, and there is some detail for all of us to get across between now and the implementation of the protocol.

Rather than protracted pro- or anti-EU conversations, we should now move in that direction. Paragraph 17 of the statement mentions that a cross-Administration technical work plan is tasked to deliver the protocol. Is there any detail or timetable around that delivery, given that the clock is ticking, and we are moving closer to December?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. Ultimately, I can agree with some aspects of what he says. Uncertainty is not good. We are looking towards the end of June to wrap up negotiations to close off that uncertainty. However, the fact that we did not proceed with the people's instruction for over three years created more uncertainty and damage to business than what the next three months will create. Let us get this done. Let us honour the will of the people, spoken by referendum and in the more recent Westminster election, and do what the people instructed to be done, which is to leave the European Union in a way that does least damage to business and creates the greatest opportunity for business and the community.

If you want to see failure as a result of leaving the European Union, that is not a good position. You might not agree with the decision or the fact that we are leaving, but we should all be looking for success, because success is to the benefit of all the people whom we represent. Failure will damage all the people whom we represent. Let us work together on getting success and not on looking for failure to prove a political point.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Dolan: I thank the Minister for his statement. I recognise the importance of unfettered access to the British market, given that 75% of our agri-food products go there. Does he agree that the failure to include minimum food standards in the Agriculture Bill and plans to phase out farm support payments mean that the British Government are opening the door to cheap food imports, which will suppress the market and price our local farmers and agri-food products out of the British market?

Mr Poots: On the question of phasing out farm support payments, I can only go by the Conservative Party manifesto, which indicated that a Conservative Government would sustain them for the lifetime of the current Parliament. That is all that a manifesto can commit to. I am not aware of any phasing out of support for

agriculture. I see huge benefits in governments supporting agriculture, especially for the environment. Abandonment of land has proven to be very detrimental to biodiversity, the environment and all of that. I do not believe that the UK Government are going down that route. I would be opposed to that, and I think that the House would be opposed to it. We will seek to ensure that that is the case.

As it stands, we will be distributing the single farm payments this year ahead of what we did under the European Union. We are capable of delivering everything that we need to by October this year as opposed to waiting until December, which was imposed on us through the European Union. I would say that much of the Agriculture Bill is Englandcentric, and England will phase out over the seven years some of what they are doing and will alter it. One thing that England is doing and is proposing to do is to reduce the larger payments and redistribute them. That may be something that we will want to do as well. We will have a discussion with the Committee about whether some of the larger payments coming for some single farm payments is appropriate or whether we invest in young people who want to come into farming and reduce the larger payments as a result.

We may want to do some of the same things as England; we may want to do some things that are completely different. I will want to do what is best for the people I represent, irrespective of what people do elsewhere.

Ms Bailey: It was good to hear the Minister say that if the EU was good to its word, it would act in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. Does he agree, then, that if the Conservative Government were good to their word, they would uphold the international treaty that they negotiated and signed off rather than threaten to break it?

Can I also ask the Minister whether he has sought assurances from his ministerial group given that we saw reports at the weekend that Brexiteers are now recommending to the Government that our food sector is not critical to the country's economy and that agriculture and fisheries certainly are not?

Mr Poots: On the protocol, I would be very surprised if the Green Party wanted higher food prices and have businesses detrimentally impacted as a consequence of that protocol, because, as things stand, they will be, and it is very clear that they will be. It is also clear that every household in Northern Ireland will be worse off as a result of the protocol, and all I hear from the Green Party is more protocol —.

Ms Bailey: We would abide by the law that was made.

Mr Poots: I think that we are —.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Excuse me, Minister. I advise Members that there should be no commentary from a seated position, please.

Mr Poots: I do not mind, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not need any protection from the Green Party or anybody else from sedentary positions or elsewhere. A bit of heckling does not really annoy me, but I thank you for your care and interest.

We need to get to the best position. A further negotiation is to take place, and I will be imploring the UK Government to make the necessary changes to the protocol so that our consumers are not hurt. I trust that the Green Party will

stand with the UK Government in getting the best deal for the people of Northern Ireland and will not accept a bad deal.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That concludes questions on the statement. Before we hear the next statement, I advise Members that I have received notice from the Minister for Health that, owing to changes resulting from his meeting with his UK colleagues, he is unable to make a statement on coronavirus until 3.30 pm, immediately after Question Time. If questions on the statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, which we are about to hear, concludes before Question Time at 2.00 pm, business will continue with Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill and the debate on the Executive's legislative programme.

However, as the Finance Minister will not be available to move his business until 1.30 pm, we may have to suspend the sitting until that time. That will depend on how we move with the next statement.

Afforestation Programme

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to talk to the House about a new programme of afforestation. I trust that it will have widespread agreement across the House and there will be a little less conflict. Who knows? We will be up for it if there is some.

As Minister, I have asked for sustainability to be placed at the heart of everything that my Department does. That includes the sustainable management of the trees and woodlands of Northern Ireland, which are one of our key natural assets, with an estimated 100,000 kilometres of tree-lined hedgerows and 113,000 hectares of woodland within which approximately 2,000 kilometres of forest tracks and paths are available for public access and broader health benefits.

It is clear how much people value our forests, and I share that appreciation. There are around five million visits to the Department's forest parks each year. However, the level of forest cover in Northern Ireland is currently 8% of land, compared with 13% in the UK, 11% in the Republic of Ireland and 43% in the European Union. They are ahead of us on that. There is a clear case for expanding forest cover here to support a thriving environment, strong economy and healthy, active communities. This will not be without its challenges. It will require partnership working across the Executive and wider public sector and, importantly, the support of rural landowners and communities. However, that does not mean that it should not be done. It will need to be achieved through a coherent policy framework within which agricultural, environmental and afforestation policies clearly complement one another. This will be a key focus of the Department over the coming months.

Planting more trees and increasing forest cover would bring a number of benefits to Northern Ireland society. There is clear evidence to show that tree planting contributes to a healthy, quality environment. It can help to mitigate climate change by removing carbon from the atmosphere. On average, one hectare of woodland captures 1,200 tons of carbon dioxide in its lifetime. It would also improve the landscape and biodiversity, and it would enable more people to improve their health, well-being and life chances through their enjoyment of this quality, natural resource. Furthermore, it would make a significant contribution to Northern Ireland's sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The gross value added by the forestry sector is around £60 million per annum from timber production activity, sustaining approximately 1,000 rural jobs. A further £60 million to £80 million is generated in the local economy from forest-based recreation and tourism.

To date, the forestry strategy has been delivered mainly through successive rural development programmes encouraging private landowners to convert agricultural land to forestry. This has resulted in the creation of small, predominately broad-leaved woodlands providing health benefits for the woodland owner, low levels of carbon sequestration potential and biodiversity benefits. The current rates of afforestation, if projected, represent only a modest rate of woodland creation — short of 1% by the middle of the century. The Committee on Climate Change called tree planting a "simple, low-cost option" to remove carbon from the atmosphere. Its 'Reducing

Emissions in Northern Ireland' report noted that the current 200 hectares of tree planting falls "well short" of the Committee's recommendation of 900 hectares of woodland a year.

The UK Government are committed to achieving net zero carbon by 2050. Climate change is a significant challenge, not only for the UK but globally. Northern Ireland can make a significant contribution to addressing these challenges at a local level through a number of innovative environmental policies, including increased afforestation that is managed sustainably and better integrated with other land uses. Increasing afforestation at the rate necessary to make a meaningful impact on carbon capture will require a strong partnership approach and the support of my Executive colleagues and Members of the House. Existing publicly owned land, including local government land, has the greatest potential for woodland creation in the short term. I have written to ministerial colleagues and to the chief executives of councils, seeking their support and commitment to make public land available for tree planting and to provide an initial assessment of the scale and extent of land that may be available.

The quality, accessibility and environmental sensitivity of the land will be key considerations in the sustainability of tree planting. I plan to establish an afforestation forum to work collectively across the public sector to coordinate the assessment of available public land and develop an action plan for increasing afforestation. I will oversee this work personally, and the forum will report to me regularly. As Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, I am committed to leading by example. I take this opportunity to advise Members of an afforestation event on 9 March at which 1,000 trees will be planted by local children on my Department's land at Loughry College, Cookstown. Similar legacy events will follow. I will continue to play a lead role in increasing afforestation and creating a sustainable environment. Importantly, this enhanced afforestation programme must encourage tree planting and create opportunities to incorporate trees and woodlands into farms and other businesses in a realistic and viable way, with the necessary reskilling programmes to enable landowners to refocus their land use.

1.00 pm

With the leadership, commitment, skills and willingness available to us, we should seek to increase forest cover significantly over the next decade. Over the next 10 years, my Department will lead a programme of afforestation called Forests for our Future. By 2030, it will have planted 18 million trees to create 9,000 hectares of new woodland, which is equivalent to 10 trees per person in Northern Ireland. The programme will improve the resilience of Northern Ireland's forests and woodlands and increase their contribution to a sustainable, healthy environment; increase the contribution of forests and woodlands to Northern Ireland's sustainable and inclusive economic growth; and increase the use of Northern Ireland's forest resources to enable more people to improve their health, well-being and life chances.

The purpose of the statement is to set out my intentions to increase afforestation to support climate change and maximise individual, community and societal benefits for the citizens of today and for generations to come. I hope that it sets out the direction of travel and receives the

support of Members, because, as I have previously said, we must seek to achieve those benefits together.

Mr McGuigan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I thank the Minister for presenting his statement today. It is a welcome announcement, given the fact that the North has only 8% of tree cover, and particularly when compared with 43% tree cover across the European Union. Something did need to happen, and I welcome the announcement. I am sure that its ambition will be widely welcomed, particularly the ambition to plant 18 million trees by 2030.

The statement refers to the Committee on Climate Change and its report from February 2019 on reducing emissions in the North. The Minister will be well aware that tree planting is only one aspect of the complex equation of dealing with climate change. He will be aware that 30% of greenhouse gas emissions in the North come from the agriculture sector. Is his Department preparing an overarching response to the Committee on Climate Change report, and, if so, when will it be given?

Mr Poots: The Member anticipates the next stage, and I hope to be in a position within two or three weeks to be able to come back to the House and develop further aspects of the green economy that we look forward to utilising to ensure that we reduce our carbon footprint.

Northern Ireland has never benefited from oil, gas or coal, so I have no issue whatsoever with moving away from fossil fuels to a much greener economy. I believe that the opportunity exists for Northern Ireland to be a seller of green energy. We should be looking to get to the point of making such a contribution. The Member is right that the trees will help. We cannot remove all carbon, but, if we want to meet this challenge head-on, reducing carbon is the biggest element, and we will identify and move forward with a course of action over the coming weeks and months. There is work to be done there. I have talked to my Executive colleagues about it and am getting great support from them. As an Executive, we will need to embrace a greener economy and move forward together.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his statement. Given the vast areas of land that government and local councils own, what steps can his Department take to encourage planting on that land?

Mr Poots: The Member is right that there are vast areas. DFI and Minister Mallon have been very willing to cooperate with me. Northern Ireland Water and Transport NI have large swathes of land that we could use, and, all being well, that will be the case. Local authorities also have large swathes of land, as, indeed, do many of the arm's-length bodies.

The actual planting of trees is not expensive: it is the acquisition of the land that is expensive. If we in Northern Ireland were to acquire 700 hectares of land each year, at roughly £25,000 per hectare, that would be a huge cost to us, so the logical thing to do is to use the land that is already available to us. We want to work on that with other Departments. I trust that other Departments, and local authorities, will do that and I believe that they will. Aside from that, we need to work with and develop the relationships that we have with the rural community in order to encourage further tree planting on privately owned land.

Mr Catney: I thank the Minister. I agree with what he has already said; that the management of forests and woodlands is an undervalued area of the economy and is also critical to managing our climate impact. Can the Minister outline the contribution that the farming community can make to forest management, carbon storage and floodplain management as a public-good contribution?

Mr Poots: The Member raises important points. The Department is looking currently at how it can actually have a better land-mapping base in Northern Ireland and the opportunity to identify, through the LIDAR scheme, where significant run-offs take place. Those are areas of land on which we would particularly encourage farmers to plant trees. We have also been looking at the areas that are closest to waterways, because, currently, farmers are not allowed, for example, to spread slurry within five metres of a waterway. We need to work with them and encourage them to plant trees around those waterways. That will be beneficial to the farmers because it will reduce opportunities for pollution of those waterways. It will lift a pressure off them that they do not need. We need to support them to do it.

Having a good assessment of land quality, various pH levels of the soil, and so on, will allow farmers better opportunities to acquire fertiliser, slurry and all that, and apply it appropriately. Planting trees on key areas of land will also assist farmers to do things in a more environmentally friendly way. This is an area where we can develop win-wins with the farming community, whereby they get appropriate support and the public get a reduced carbon footprint, better and cleaner waters, and better air quality.

Mrs Barton: I thank the Minister for his statement. He quoted that £60 million to £80 million is generated in the local economy from forest-based recreation and tourism. Where did he get those figures? Have they been tested for accuracy?

Mr Poots: The figures come from my Department, which has done a course of work on the matter. There are just short of 5 million visits to forest parks each year. Those who use them include walkers, cyclists and the film industry. There are splendid waterways in forest parks. We have some real gems in Northern Ireland. I think of the forest parks at Castlewellan, Tollymore, Hillsborough and Gortin Glen. There are many more. I will probably offend people by not mentioning the beautiful forests that they have in their constituencies.

Mr Stalford: Belvoir.

Mr Poots: Belvoir is an inner-city one, which is a real asset to the city that many cities do not have. There are many forests, which are a huge asset to the community and economy.

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for his statement. He has guessed already — of course, correctly — that some of us are more enthusiastic about this statement than the previous one. In that regard, he is right. It is commendable that the Minister's personal interest in and commitment to the Forests for our Future programme are clear from the text of the statement. We genuinely thank him for that. I add a very swift follow-up to a question that I asked as a supplementary. It may have been the Minister's first Question Time when he promised us an announcement soon on afforestation. We look forward to future timely delivery on environmental protection and other matters.

Action plans and working groups have been referred to, but how best can we ensure that the plans are future-proofed and wildlife-proof with regard to broadleaf species, for example, and local wildlife?

Mr Poots: I certainly think that, particularly for the small plantings that local farmers do, you would give them support only in instances where it is broadleaf species as opposed to commercial species. We have a very successful commercial arm in our Department that grows trees that are harvested and replanted. That still has significant benefits, but nonetheless we want to increase the amount of broadleaf trees that are being planted. Much of the work that we will do with, for example, local authorities and private landowners will be very much based on broadleaf trees.

The Member mentioned sustainability. There are some soils that we will not want to plant on. The more peat-based soils already have a lot of carbon sequestration. Consequently, we do not want to plant trees on that, because it could have less sequestration in that instance. We need to plant trees in the appropriate soils to ensure the sustainability that the Member referred to.

Mr M Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is important to highlight, as the Minister has, the important role that landowners play already in this area. Does the Minister believe that more could be achieved through the environmental farming scheme?

Mr Poots: The environmental farming scheme has been a good success thus far and has had good uptake. As we move forward, we will seek to make amendments and changes to it to deliver further success. One of the things that I really want to look at is what are termed riparian boundaries, which are the boundaries along the rivers. I indicated earlier that that will reduce run-off towards rivers from the land; where the land is rich in nutrients, more of those nutrients will be kept in the soil. It is important to keep those nutrients in the soil and away from the waterways. Appropriate tree-planting may be something that could assist us in doing that.

Dr Archibald: I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. I also thank him for the response to my question for written answer on the issue. I am pleased to see that plans for an afforestation strategy are being progressed as one of the measures to tackle carbon emissions, and also the commitments around broadleaf native trees to support our biodiversity.

Following on from a previous question, tackling the climate emergency requires a framework for climate action, which would be underpinned by legislation. Of course, the Assembly has voted to declare a climate emergency and to implement the measures on climate in New Decade, New Approach. Will the Minister advise of the time frame for bringing forward a climate change Bill, please?

Mr Poots: That is a course of work that my officials are looking at, but we are not in a position at this stage to give an outline of that programme. I will bring forward other issues that will demonstrate our commitment to having a quality, enhanced environment in Northern Ireland, where we will have cleaner waterways, cleaner air and a reduced carbon footprint. All of that is achievable by taking necessary steps. Some of those will be small steps and some will be larger, but nonetheless we will take them. This is one of the important steps that we are taking. I trust that the BBC, for example, will recognise that this is

an important step and not a waste of money; there was a programme that went out, I think, last week that slammed the Assembly for wanting to plant trees.

I think it put the cost of planting at something like £10 per tree; we can actually acquire whips for around 50p per tree. It is not a huge expense to the public purse; it is a benefit to the public purse. I trust that the BBC will reflect on the stupidity and the fallacy in a lot of the issues that it raised with the New Decade, New Approach deal and our commitment to planting more trees and making a better environment in Northern Ireland.

1.15 pm

Mr Givan: I welcome the Minister's statement and the announcements in it. It is vital that we enhance the natural habitat because of the benefits that that will bring to the environment and to people by getting them out of their workplaces, off their technological devices and embracing the natural habitat around them. The Minister's statement is very welcome.

I am surprised that the Minister did not mention Hillsborough forest park in his constituency when he named a number of others. I welcome the ongoing work at Hillsborough forest park. The community is looking forward to the improvements and the greater accessibility that they will provide. Will the Minister indicate whether he has any plans to widen community accessibility to Forest Service's assets so that, when it comes to the organisation of events, we maximise the number of people who can avail themselves of the facilities and reassure the community that Forest Service is not just about trees?

Mr Poots: In recent years — predating me — the Forest Service has been engaging better with the community. For years, it was just about the trees and not about the people who were benefiting from it.

The Member mentioned Hillsborough, and the biggest problem in Hillsborough is that we are attracting twice as many people as was predicted. The number of people who want to come to those facilities is phenomenal. I was recently in south Tyrone — Brantry — and saw the wonderful new paths that have been created there, which are being well utilised by members of the public. One thing that really encourages me is the number of disabled people who previously could not use the paths but now can, as the paths have been made disabled-friendly so that people can travel around those forests. That has been a huge success.

Many people engage in mountain biking in forests, and, while it is a sport that I would not necessarily recommend, because people sustain a lot of injuries, people get real enjoyment from it, and Forest Service has been more facilitating in recent years on that front.

In the summertime, there are youth camps in some of our forest parks, and young people spend a number of days there. What better place could they be in than in that natural environment, enjoying the biodiversity and the beautiful rivers that run through our forest parks and seeing all the wildlife. I want to encourage that so that more young people get out into our forest parks. They need to be a resource for all of our community. We are building towards that, but there is more work to be done.

Mr McAleer: The last Member to speak referred to something that I was going to mention. I note and welcome

the fact that we have some five million visitors to forest parks each year, who generate £60 million to £80 million through forest-based recreation and tourism. There are some good examples, and I am glad that the Minister mentioned the Gortin Glen forest park in my area, which is a fantastic example of partnership working between his Forest Service and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, which delivered an absolutely fantastic product.

Just last week, I facilitated a group of people from the Cappagh Village Regeneration Group to meet Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to look at realising the potential of the Altmore forest, which covers 597 hectares and straddles the Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster council districts. As part of the Minister's Forests for the Future strategy, will he give a commitment to build on the excellent work that he and his Department have been engaged in with councils and local communities? Will he commit to bringing back a report on his plans to build, develop and grow that partnership working?

Mr Poots: I am happy to give the Member the assurance that we will seek to build on that. We could not do it without the assistance of local government, which has really stepped up to the plate in providing additional funding and resource to make better utilisation of the facilities. That is partnership working, and that is how things should work. We have a wonderful asset that is not being utilised quite as well as it could be, and local government is coming in and assisting us in opening up that utilisation. I want to continue to work on those types of programmes to ensure that the public can enjoy that rich asset that belongs to them.

Mr O'Toole: Unfortunately, I did not get in quickly enough to ask the Minister a question on his previous statement, but, perhaps, for both of us, in the interests of agreement, it is a little better that I am asking him on this one because there is probably more consensus.

I welcome his statement and the sentiment behind it. What conversations has the Minister had or does he intend to have with Belfast City Council? One of his colleagues — I think it was my constituency colleague behind him — mentioned Belvoir forest. This is not just about rural areas. Last year, Belfast City Council passed, with, I think, cross-party support, an initiative to plant a million trees. It would be useful to have an indication from him about what conversations he has had with Belfast City Council about supporting that million-tree initiative and ensuring that urban forests are developed in a way that is beneficial for everyone.

Mr Poots: Current practice is to engage with council delivery practitioners. It has proved very successful, and we have signed a series of memorandums of understanding. Some 85% of those recent memorandums have led to real beneficial change in our forest parks. We have engaged with Belfast City Council, and that engagement will continue to see how we can further enhance that. Belfast, I believe, wants to plant one million trees, and we are more than happy to work with, support, lend expertise and facilitate it in how we can do that. That takes us one eighteenth of the way there; we have another 17 eighteenthths to go beyond what Belfast City Council wants to do. If every constituency was to plant a million trees, we would be there, so that would put four million in Belfast. We understand that there is less land availability there, and a million trees would certainly be a huge asset to the city of Belfast. We are happy to work with the council on that.

Mr Harvey: Will the Minister outline what schemes his Department has in place to encourage afforestation?

Mr Poots: There are a number of schemes with the local farming community. The Forest Service has been constantly and steadily planting trees and seeking to acquire land to plant trees. Acquiring land is so expensive that it holds back the work that you can do on afforestation, so I am looking at a change of focus and at how we can identify pockets of unutilised land in a range of Departments other than DAERA to see how we can quickly get wins on afforestation. Some of those land portions could be substantial, particularly lands relating to Water Service. We need cooperation from all those organisations, and I trust that we will get it. We will continue to introduce schemes that will encourage and support the planting of forests.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome it. Will the Minister expand a bit on whether he intends to use councils to encourage local community groups and schoolchildren to roll out this programme? Obviously, this would give them a bit of ownership, and I think that it would be a better programme if he looked towards rolling it out in that way.

Mr Poots: We want to encourage young people to become engaged in tree planting, so we are working with the Department of Education and, because of the colleges, the Department for the Economy. We ought to encourage young people to participate. Young people have a real interest in environmental issues and in having a cleaner, greener environment. Tree planting is one element of that in which young people can get involved. We will encourage that, and we will encourage communities to get involved. Local authorities are much better placed than we are and can assist us in doing that. I am surprised that the Member did not mention the Ring of Gullion forest park, which is another fantastic asset that is used by many, and it is good to see it opened up in that way.

Mr Buckley: I, too, pay tribute to the Minister for this positive statement. I can think of no better place than this beautiful, wood-inspired environment in which to announce positive action on afforestation. I draw particular attention to the Department's forest parks, which he mentioned, and I note that, in my constituency and the surrounding area, we have Peatlands Park and Loughgall Country Park. The Minister quoted visitor numbers of five million and the positive lifestyle and fitness regimes that those parks can provide. In many areas, the biggest obstacle is access, particularly in the winter months. Will the Minister commit to looking at potential ways of opening up parks to provide better access, thereby boosting the numbers who can benefit from those tree-inspired environments?

Mr Poots: We have been able to deliver on that work through engagement with local authorities. I understand that, particularly after the month of weather that we have just had, some of our assets may be a little trickier to access than others. We want to create a facility that is available 365 days of the year. We will be happy to work with local authorities to create opportunities for them to maximise the usage of the wonderful assets in their community.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for this positive statement. It brings to mind the old proverb that was quoted here recently upon the passing of Seamus Mallon:

"A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they will never sit."

We have quite a long way to go before we can be considered great, and, of course, the Minister has a wee bit to go before he can be considered old. He spoke about working with local authorities and other Departments. In particular, what work can be done with the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) on planning policy and with councils as they form their local development plans on enshrining a requirement that some planning applications have to include planting?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for not accusing me of being old yet. It is all relative. To an 80-year-old, I am young; to a 20-year-old, I am old. Given that the Member is closer to my age, he probably does not see the old bit, but young people probably see us as not being young. That is all an aside.

On planning policy, trees are more challenging in built-up areas. I suspect that most Members have been lobbied about getting trees taken away and so forth because of roots growing through footpaths or leaves shedding on people's roofs and causing problems. Tree planting in urban areas and, especially, identifying it through planning need to be done with the appropriate trees, and it needs to be done in a way that causes good impacts as opposed to negative impacts on the people who live there. I do not want to insist on trees being planted, only for somebody to have to whack them all down with a chainsaw in 20 years' time. We need to get it right, and we are happy to work with the Department for Infrastructure on the planning side to ensure that local authorities' planning divisions look at the issues appropriately.

Of course, green areas are left in new-build areas nowadays. It is about how we can plant trees appropriately in those areas.

1.30 pm

Nothing beats driving through a city with a broad avenue that has trees lining either side of it. It looks fantastic. We need to ensure that we can have appropriate planting of trees in our urban areas.

Mr Stalford: I associate myself with the Minister's remarks about the appalling cynicism that we heard on the BBC last week. It was disgraceful. What assessment has been made of the long-term health benefits for the population, particularly in urban areas, as a consequence of planting more trees?

Mr Poots: Everybody knows that trees have major benefits. Trees, as does grass, suck carbon out of the atmosphere and into our soil through photosynthesis. That is of real importance to us.

Getting people out into forested areas, where they can get activity and the air is cleaner, is a real health benefit. Belvoir Park forest in the Member's constituency is such a massive asset to have in any city. Most cities do not have the opportunity to have a forest park contained within them. Some would see that as being valuable development land. We see it as valuable environmental land that is being utilised appropriately in an urban setting.

Mr O'Dowd: The Minister will be delighted to know that, to end on a happy note, I will bring the subject back to Brexit. In his statement, he refers to the successful

implementation of rural development programmes. Those programmes will not be successful without European funding. How will the Minister replace that funding?

I have to say that the statement is very welcome, and I welcome the fact that the Minister will take a lead role in the programme, but everything requires money.

Mr Poots: We have argued for £340 million that was associated with the European Union to come directly from Westminster. We have argued that it should not go into the Barnett formula but should be separately apportioned. I understand that the Finance Minister will also make that argument, and I will be working closely with him to ensure that we maximise what we can get. I trust that we will be able to move forward together in the best interests of all the people whom we serve.

Ms Bailey: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is welcome to see him move so swiftly to take action on reforestation across Northern Ireland. As somebody who lives on the boundary of Belvoir Park forest and who spent the weekend in Cregagh Glen, I have to say that the work done by many agencies to look after our spaces is to be commended. It was great to hear that you could plant another million trees in Belfast, because everybody benefits from having such spaces.

I was going to ask the Minister about the land that has been identified for planting, but I think that he addressed that when he spoke about not planting on land that can release more carbon than the trees would capture. Can he therefore give us any updates on how his Department is working to establish an independent environmental protection agency, as was voted for in the House a few weeks back?

Mr Poots: It is slightly off subject, but it is work that we are looking at. In particular, an Environment Bill will come forward that will, for example, identify the need for replacing the work that the European Commission does. An Office for Environmental Protection will be established as a result of that legislation, and it will be wholly independent of government. That is one of the areas that we are looking at when it comes to the hasty establishment of an independent environment agency.

Mr Allister: While there may be much that is laudable about this proposal, I have heard little reference to costing. Is there a business case for this policy? Does it involve taking any land into public ownership? Is there any assessment of the husbandry costs involved? Those are the sorts of things we have not heard about. If it is, in part, about incentivising farmers to grow trees, what is the nature of that incentivisation and will it have any adverse impact on food production? Finally, is this statement and its proposal, linked to what has been grandly called the Great Ulster Forest, which was in 'New Deal, New Approach', supposedly something to do with the centenary? Is this what the Great Ulster Forest is, or is there are some other proposition and, if there is, what is the relationship between them?

Mr Poots: Certainly, all afforestation will be contained in this, so that we can have a significant planting to mark 2021. I hope it will be there in 100 years' time, still in Northern Ireland, for people to enjoy and celebrate.

The Member asks what benefit there is to the farming community. There is already grant aid for woodland creation. That can be integrated into the whole farm management programme. It complements the agricultural

value of the land. In many instances, farmers like sheltered places, for example, for young calves. That can be a real benefit. Providing buffer strips reduces the risk of accidental breaches of water pollution and biosecurity standards. We can reduce the ammonia loss to the atmosphere from point sources and, in some areas, it will convert steep slopes, which are hazardous for farming on, and areas that are unproductive and currently just growing bracken and gorse, into forest.

Those are all areas where we can work with the private landowners in developing. We can work with our own government bodies in developing some of those areas where land is not well utilised at present. I am sure that the Member would welcome us planting trees on such land and improving the opportunities for capturing carbon and providing environmental improvements as a result.

There is no real dispute that trees are a benefit to community. We can appropriately deliver a better-forested Northern Ireland, in line with our network of hedgerows, and create a really beneficial place, environmentally and aesthetically. By encouraging tourists to come to Northern Ireland, major benefits may be had from a programme like this.

The estimated cost is around £80 million over the 10 years.

Mr Carroll: The Minister stated correctly that removing carbon from the atmosphere is essential. Afforestation obviously provides an opportunity to do so. Does he agree that re-wetting drained bogs and bogland is also essential to tackling climate change, so that they will act as a huge carbon sink?

Mr Poots: It is certainly something that will capture more carbon. It is a little controversial in that it may involve other people's lands and therefore it is something that we need to look at, and we need to work with other people in doing that and exercise due caution in that respect. There is a carbon benefit in further wetting our wetlands, but there are challenges in relation to that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That concludes questions on the statement.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it still a rule of the House that, in respect of ministerial statements such as we have just had, when calling Members to speak, priority is given to those who have sat through the debate and that those who flit in and out of the debate go to the end of the queue? Is that still the rule of this House, and if it is, how was Mr O'Dowd called at the point at which he was called?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): You have raised a valid point. It will be referred to the Speaker's Office for further investigation. If it is in breach of any protocol or standard, we will get back to you through the Speaker's Office on that matter. If not, likewise.

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is worth pointing out that I was in the House for the entirety of both statements.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): There is a record kept of Members coming and going. Members will be aware that, in order to ask any question about a statement, they need to be here for the statement itself. Thank you.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Iarraimse ar an Aire Airgeadais Conor Murphy an Bille a mholadh. I call the Minister to move the Consideration Stage.

Moved. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): No amendments to the Bill have been tabled. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the eight clauses of the Bill for question on stand part, followed by the four schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 4 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Legislative Programme

Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the Executive's legislative programme as presented by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in their statement of 11 February 2020.

On 11 February, the First Minister and I made a written statement to advise the Assembly of the legislation that Ministers of the Executive Committee intend to introduce in the remainder of this 2019-2020 session. In doing so, we fulfil the obligation placed upon the Executive by the New Decade, New Approach deal to publish a legislative programme within one month of their operation. Within that statement, we also committed ourselves to table a motion for debate on its contents.

It might be useful to Members for me to begin my setting out the principal considerations that informed the preparation for government. The context in which this programme is being presented differs significantly from that of previous years. The continuity in policy and legislative development, which could normally be maintained between different mandates and sessions of the Assembly, has undoubtedly been disrupted by the hiatus of the last three years.

Ministers have inherited responsibility for a wide range of issues that may ultimately require the enactment of legislation. Departments have not, however, in the absence of Ministers, been able to develop policy, in many cases, to a point where it can yet be translated into firm proposals for Bills. Therefore, there is a great deal of work to be done across Departments in reinvigorating the policy development process, and Ministers are now actively doing so.

Since 11 January, Ministers have been briefing themselves not only on outstanding issues, but also on the commitments arising from the New Decade, New Approach deal and from the Programme for Government, when it is agreed. These are, therefore, still early days, and whilst the Executive is committed to restoring the work of this Administration to full capacity as soon as possible, the situation will obviously determine the size and content of a legislative programme at this time.

We are also, unlike previous years, not at the beginning of a mandate, but over halfway through. That has both advantages and disadvantages. The two years remaining to us obviously place a constraint on the number of Bills that will be able to complete their passage before the end of the mandate. As the mandate progresses, this factor and the risk of nugatory activity will be important considerations.

At the same time, those constraints will place a discipline on all partners in the legislative process — Departments, Ministers, the Assembly and its Committees — to progress legislation efficiently and accord the progress of Bills due priority.

1.45 pm

As we usher in a new kind of politics, we want this legislature to make laws that benefit our people. For the purposes, therefore, of the legislative programme that we have published, the Executive have focused on those legislative proposals that we believe can be introduced as

Bills before the summer recess and that, with some degree of certainty, can consequently complete their passage before the Assembly is dissolved in 2022.

I recognise that the programme is focused on a number of Departments and that some Members with an interest in a particular issue may be disappointed at the absence, at this stage, of legislation relating to those. However, we believe that it is of no benefit to the Executive or the Assembly to include proposals at this time, the timescales of which are still speculative. However, I take this opportunity to assure the Assembly that this programme does not represent the last word on legislation during the remainder of this mandate. It is in no way an exhaustive programme. We are aware that Ministers wish to bring forward additional legislative proposals, which will be admitted to the programme when they have reached a state of readiness and have obtained Executive agreement.

The programme will be monitored regularly to assess progress and to identify emerging legislation. We anticipate, therefore, providing the Assembly with an update and, if necessary, a revised programme at an appropriate point later in the year.

I turn now to the programme. I will briefly set out the purpose of each Bill as set out in our statement. The Minister for Communities wishes to introduce four Bills. They concern welfare mitigation, housing, pension schemes and liquor licensing respectively. Considerable urgency attaches to the welfare mitigation Bill, which would extend the mitigation for the social sector size criteria, otherwise known as the bedroom tax, and the housing (amendment) Bill, which is needed to reclassify housing associations to the public sector in accounting terms and thus remove a potentially considerable financial impediment to the funding of social housing. The pension scheme Bill will provide overdue protection to those who are saving for their pension in master trusts.

Members will recall that a licensing Bill had previously been introduced in the Assembly but fell on dissolution in 2017. That Bill will introduce a number of reforms to address alcohol misuse and support our growing hospitality sector, which plays a vital role in our economy, and acknowledge the role played by licensed premises and private registered clubs in their local communities.

The Minister of Finance has already introduced the first of the two Budget Bills — an essential part of the annual financial cycle.

The Minister of Justice intends to introduce a criminal justice Bill to reform the committal process by abolishing oral evidence at the traditional committal hearing stage and providing clarity regarding the operational outworking of direct committal. A domestic abuse Bill will create a new domestic abuse offence, which will capture patterns of controlling and coercive behaviour against a partner, former partner or family member. This is a very important issue in our society, and the Executive are firmly committed to confronting it without delay.

Finally, we, as First Minister and deputy First Minister, will introduce three Bills to implement commitments given in the New Decade, New Approach deal. They will make provision for an office of identity and cultural expression, an Irish language commissioner, and official recognition of the status of the Irish language, and a commissioner to enhance and develop the —

Mr K Buchanan: Deputy First Minister, clarity is required regarding “make provision to appoint” and “make provision”. There seems to be an administrative error with regard to the three aspects of the Bill. Will you confirm that there will be no difference in the handling of those aspects and that the three items will go through together with the same degree of importance?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Sorry, Minister, you have been moving along very efficiently, but it was remiss of me not to say that the Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate, with 10 minutes in which to move and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mrs O’Neill: To clarify, that is an oversight in the written statement that was previously produced. I am happy to confirm that the three pieces of legislation will move together through the legislative process.

As I said, we will introduce three Bills. They will make provision for the office of identity and cultural expression, an Irish language commissioner, and official recognition of the status of the Irish language, and a commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster-Scots/Ulster-British tradition. Those Bills represent important milestones as we move forward together as a society on the basis of mutual respect and parity of esteem for each other’s traditions, national identities and cultural difference, whether British, Irish or newcomer communities.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O’Neill: Those legislative proposals —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O’Neill: Go ahead.

Mr Allister: Right. The deputy First Minister said that the three Bills will move forward together. Can she be clear that we should nonetheless expect a separate vote on each at the Second Stage and the Consideration Stage of each Bill, there being three separate Bills? Is that correct?

Mrs O’Neill: Yes, three distinct, separate pieces of legislation will come through the House and move together.

The legislative proposals will be subject to the established procedure for Executive referral and consideration before their introduction, and they will, of course, also be subject to consideration in the Chamber and in Committee.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I commend the legislative programme to the Assembly as a positive start to our engagement and that of the Ministers responsible for the Bills with it on legislative matters and as a framework for the delivery of our shared obligation to improve and protect the well-being of our community. We look forward to providing the Assembly with a report on progress in due course.

Ms P Bradley (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities): I want to make a few comments as Chair of the Committee for Communities. I welcome the Executive’s legislative programme. The Minister for Communities attended the Committee meeting last week to discuss her priorities, which include the introduction of a number of Bills before the summer recess. The Assembly will already be aware of the need for a Bill to extend social

sector size criteria or bedroom tax mitigation measures. The need for that to proceed via accelerated passage was explained to the Committee by the Minister just a couple of weeks ago. The Committee supports the Minister in that approach, and we hope to see the Bill introduced to the Assembly very soon. As the Minister herself said, it is essential in order to support the 38,000 households that would otherwise be subject to additional housing costs.

The housing (amendment) Bill is yet another priority. Every Member knows only too well the myriad issues on housing. Along with the extension of the bedroom mitigation measures, a most immediate housing issue facing us is the need to legislate in order to redesignate housing associations as private organisations. We need the Bill to ensure that our housing associations can continue to build social homes and to give the Department the ability to access funds through financial transactions capital. The Committee acknowledges that accelerated passage is, again, a likely approach, and we look forward to the Minister coming to the Committee with her proposals.

Just last week, the Committee received a request for Committee support for a legislative consent motion (LCM) relating to the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill. That is a complex and quite technical piece of legislation. We will hopefully receive a briefing from the Department on that next week and reach a decision on that request soon after.

Liquor licensing reform is also a legislative priority. The Committee will receive a briefing at its meeting this week on the outcome of the most recent consultation on the proposed licensing and registration of clubs (amendment) Bill. I understand that there were over 1,500 responses to the consultation, indicating the level of interest in the legislation. We expect the Bill to be introduced within the next few weeks, and the Committee looks forward to making progress in its scrutiny of the Bill soon after that. There is an eagerness in various sectors to get the Bill progressed through the Assembly as soon as possible, particularly as the previous Committee had made significant progress on similar legislation. However, I caution that there will be no shortcuts in the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill. Due process will be followed, and we will take as long as we need, within statutory time limits, to do the job properly.

We know that, on a slightly more distant horizon, the Committee will also be presented with a Bill on gambling reform. The consultation on proposals has just ended, and the Committee will hopefully get a briefing on that soon.

It is encouraging that the Executive have laid out their initial legislative programme. After all, the Assembly is, first and foremost, a legislature, but we have only two years left in this mandate, and the Executive need to exercise caution in their legislative priorities. In doing so, they need to consider the capacity of the Assembly and its Committees to process the legislation. Loading Committees with two or even three Bills at the same time is not good practice. It will not lead to good scrutiny and could lead to bad legislation. I, therefore, urge Ministers to consult with their respective Committees on the logistics underpinning the timetabling of legislation.

The Committee for Communities looks forward to providing advice and assistance to the Minister on her proposed legislation so that we can get the best outcomes for all the people whom we represent.

Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Over the past number of weeks, the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has been engaged in discussions on the Agriculture Bill and the Environment Bill. Those two chunky pieces of legislation are going through Westminster, and we are operating according to its timetable.

We have been scrutinising the schedules that relate specifically to here. There are quite a number of challenges. We note, for example, that Scotland has moved ahead with its own agriculture Act. We aspire to that and would prefer to have our own Act here. Given the timescales, however, it might not be realistic to achieve that by the end of the mandate. The Committee will look at the LCM route, which is the option that the Welsh have chosen. The Welsh Assembly inserted a sunset clause into an LCM. That will apply until it gets to the stage where it can introduce its own agriculture Bill.

Last week, we looked at the Environment Bill and heard from a number of stakeholders. Indeed, over the past two weeks, we have had all-day meetings with stakeholders from across the sector. There are quite a number of challenges, particularly in relation to the proposed office for environmental protection in Britain and how that will interface with the proposed new independent environment agency here and the NIEA.

A lot of work is going on. This week, we will begin scrutiny, at a fast pace, of the Fisheries Bill. I want to stress how important it is — Paula mentioned it just now — that the Minister continues to engage very closely with the Committee and the sector as we roll out our legislative work programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. This debate will continue after the statement from the Health Minister, which will be taken after Question Time. The next Member to speak in the debate will be Colin McGrath.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Bill of Rights: Panel of Experts

1. **Ms Mullan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the panel of experts to assist the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights has been identified. (AQO 222/17-22)

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): The motion to establish an Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights was agreed by the Assembly on Monday 24 February. The Committee is to submit a report to the Assembly by 28 February 2022. Officials have been liaising with the Assembly authorities and are working up options for the appointment of the five expert panel members to facilitate an early ministerial decision.

Ms Mullan: Will the First Minister set out the areas of expertise that they will cover?

Mrs Foster: It is important that the bill of rights group sticks to the areas specific to Northern Ireland. Other bill of rights processes did not come to fruition, because they became expansionist. It is therefore important that we deal with just the issues. The Belfast Agreement refers to human rights issues that are particular to Northern Ireland. We hope that the appointed experts very much take that into consideration in any work that they undertake.

Dr Aiken: In the discussions about reforming the petition of concern, the First Minister was rightly against the expert input from the Human Rights Commission. Why are you supportive of its expert input in this case?

Mrs Foster: It is not the case that the Human Rights Commission will be the experts. The Executive Office is asking for people to register their interest. We will then choose, probably by a public appointments process, five experts to advise the Ad Hoc Committee. It will then be for that Committee to bring forward a report in 2022.

Mr Durkan: Is all-party consensus a precondition for the bill of rights?

Mrs Foster: I hope that we will be able to reach consensus on that important issue. It is right to go forward on that basis. Many issues can be discussed in the Ad Hoc Committee. The Member will know that, as I said, unfortunately, there was not that consensus in the past, mainly because we looked beyond the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, and it became an expansionist piece of work. There is more than enough that can be done on the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, and I hope that the Ad Hoc Committee will be able to bring its report forward in due time.

Ms Bradshaw: I was on the original bill of rights body in 2008 and met my husband on it, so one good thing came out of it.

What contingency will be in place if there is not that consensus? Will it then fall to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to veto or agree the proposals?

Mrs Foster: I do not think that we are looking down the road at vetoing proposals. We are hopeful that there will be consensus on the Ad Hoc Committee after the consideration of expert advice. I am sure that it will take advice and evidence from a wide range of interested parties on the important issue of rights, issues of poverty and issues that affect people across Northern Ireland.

The Ad Hoc Committee has a lot of work to do. We hope to be in a position to appoint the expert panel in the near future, once we have received guidance from our officials.

Northern Ireland Centenary 2021

2. **Mrs Cameron** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on preparations to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021, as referred to in New Decade, New Approach. (AQO 223/17-22)

Mrs Foster: The Member will be aware that the United Kingdom Government made a commitment in the New Decade, New Approach deal to work with the Executive to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021 and to make available funding to mark that centenary. This will include facilitating national recognition and international awareness of this significant anniversary, as well as exploring projects such as a shared history fund, the restoration of Craigavon House and the Great Ulster Forest.

Mrs Cameron: Does the First Minister agree that the centenary in 2021 could be used as an opportunity to better promote Northern Irish businesses and local tourism on the international stage?

Mrs Foster: I very much hope that that is the case. We know that Scotland has made great use of its Homecoming event to promote Scotland as a place not just to visit but to invest in. Like many, I am sure, I look forward to marking the centenary. I recognise, of course, that there are different views and narratives around the centenary of Northern Ireland, but it is an opportunity to do as the Member said and encourage investment to build our economy and do more on the tourism product.

Mr McCann: The Minister is aware that there are many different narratives around the formation of the Northern state. That difference of experience will extend to the occasion of its centenary. How will the Minister ensure that all perspectives are affirmed, accommodated and acknowledged?

Mrs Foster: The Member will recognise that, during the decade of centenaries, there has been appropriate recognition of the different narratives and views, sometimes through lectures and sometimes through symposiums. It is an opportunity. Of course, he will view the centenary in a different way from how I will view the centenary. I will view it as a time of celebration, but I recognise that there are different views and narratives around it. I am sure that there will be events planned to reflect and look back on all those issues.

Mr Allister: Does the First Minister agree that the extent to which the Executive Office is permitted to optimise the celebrations of the centenary will be a telling test of

the platitudes of her partner in government when they talk about respect and a shared future? In that regard, will the Executive Office lobby for the proclamation of an additional public holiday to recognise the centenary? Will the Executive Office seek and support a visit by Her Majesty to address the Assembly on the occasion of the centenary of the formation of the Northern Ireland Parliament? Can the First Minister deliver on those things, or will she be thwarted by the Sinn Féin veto?

Mrs Foster: There are a number of questions in there. On the issue of respect, I hope that, as a joint office, we will be able to show respect to all the communities in Northern Ireland. Of course, a lot of us in Northern Ireland will want to mark the centenary in a meaningful and celebratory way; that is acknowledged. Having said that, I acknowledge that there are others who take a different view. I, personally, would very much welcome a visit from Her Majesty The Queen. I welcome many royal visitors to Northern Ireland. It is a great privilege of my office to do that. I recently welcomed the Duchess of Cambridge to Northern Ireland. I would be absolutely delighted if Her Majesty The Queen were to grace us with her presence during the centenary year; I would be hugely supportive of that.

It is important that we use the centenary in a meaningful way, that we allow it to unite rather than divide us and that we look to the next period of time in Northern Ireland, when, I hope, we can build a stronger Northern Ireland economically and move forward for all of our people.

Mr Butler: How far behind does the First Minister think our preparations are when compared with those for the centenary of the Ulster covenant?

Mrs Foster: I do not think that we are behind at all; in fact, the fact that the United Kingdom Government made commitments in 'New Decade, New Approach' indicates that they want to work with us to make sure that we mark the centenary in an appropriate, inclusive way that makes a difference for people in Northern Ireland. As I have said in all my answers, I recognise that, for those of us who value Northern Ireland and its place in the United Kingdom, this is a time of great celebration but there are other narratives and views on that, and I am sure that there will be appropriate mechanisms through which everybody in Northern Ireland will be able to have their voice heard.

Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland: Executive Commitment

3. **Mr Muir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what commitment they can give that the Executive, and all Ministers, will act to implement the revised protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. (AQO 224/17-22)

Mrs Foster: Our priority is to ensure that the needs of Northern Ireland are understood and reflected as we move forward. Although political differences exist, the Executive are working together to ensure the best possible outcome for people living here. We are working to ensure that our businesses do not face increased costs, especially in terms of movement of goods North/South or east-west. We are in a unique position here, and we have concerns that the interdependencies between the protocol and the trade negotiations are not fully recognised. We have requested a meeting with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, where we will raise those

concerns. We will also wish to ensure that our economy can flourish. That will require that the United Kingdom Government uphold their commitments to guarantee unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses to the whole of the United Kingdom internal market and to engage with us on measures to protect and strengthen the UK internal market.

Mr Muir: As the First Minister will be aware, Europe is watching carefully to ensure that everyone lives up to their obligations arising from the protocol, which is not a backstop but, indeed, a full stop. How does the First Minister reassure the European Union that there will be no bad faith in the context of the view most recently expressed by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, when he stated that he would resist pressure to implement checks at Northern Ireland ports and had no intention of putting infrastructure in place?

Mrs Foster: I am sure that the Member is not suggesting that we should fetter the trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and from Northern Ireland into Great Britain, because that, of course, would mean that we would not have a border on the island of Ireland but would have a border between different countries within the same United Kingdom. That would be wrong, and it is important for us to engage with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster so that we can find out what he means when he says that there will not be any barriers and then work through all of that. We are, of course, aware of what the European Union says about the matter, but we are very interested to hear what the United Kingdom Government have to say on the issue because they are the negotiating power in terms of Northern Ireland. Therefore, we need to hear what they propose in relation to the protocol and, indeed, in relation to our free trade agreements.

Mr Robinson: What is the First Minister's view of the United Kingdom mandate for negotiation that was published last week?

Mrs Foster: I am sure that the Member has read in great detail the United Kingdom's mandate for negotiations. It is very high-level. The deputy First Minister and I noted, when the mandate was published, that it is crucial that we are involved in the decisions that affect directly the people and businesses of Northern Ireland, and, although political differences exist on the issue of leaving the European Union, we are working together as a whole to ensure the best possible outcome for the people living here. We need to have our voice heard, and the deputy First Minister and I have requested an urgent meeting with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster so that we can raise our concerns and so that we are heard to make sure that there is not a cost put on our businesses — indeed, costs that could then be transferred to our consumers. We want to make sure that we have the answers to that, and that is why that meeting with the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP is important.

Mr O'Toole: First Minister, we have heard conflicting and contradictory things from different parts of the UK Government regarding unfettered access for Northern Ireland to Great Britain markets and contradictory things about the upholding of the protocol that was signed and is now binding in a treaty that is legally held at the United Nations. Given that, will the First Minister agree with me that by far the best outcome for Northern Ireland from the trade talks between the UK and EU is the closest possible relationship between the United Kingdom and the

European Union, and will she and the deputy First Minister make those representations on behalf of Northern Ireland?

2.15 pm

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The best possible outcome, of course, is a free trade arrangement between the United Kingdom Government and the European Union. That would do away with the current protocol and mean that there would be free trade with the European Union right across the United Kingdom. We will work with the Government to try to achieve that. Whether the European Union will be interested in it is another matter. Certainly, that is where the Government wish to go, and I, for one, will support them in so doing.

Ms Sheerin: North/South trade is vital to the economy. It is worth billions of pounds in goods and services. Will the Minister outline how the protocol will address concerns about the cross-border provision of tradable services and the sharing of data across the island?

Mrs Foster: Services are not covered by the protocol. We very much want that area to be dealt with so that east-west and North/South services can continue. The Republic of Ireland is an important destination for our goods and services, but the Great Britain market is by far the largest market for those goods and services. In 2017, it was worth £24.6 billion to the Northern Ireland economy, compared with £6.5 billion for the Republic of Ireland. It is very important that we have all those relationships — North/South and east-west — dealt with in a way that does not damage the economy and helps businesses that want to grow.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the First Minister agree that it is matter of regret that we do not have a Northern Ireland-specific shortage occupation list, as recommended by the Migration Advisory Council as early as May 2019? Will she call on her colleague in the Department for the Economy to rectify the situation as a matter of urgency?

Mrs Foster: As I understand from the recent announcement by the Home Secretary, she has agreed to a Northern Ireland shortage occupation list. That will come forward now. As the Member will know, that announcement was made very recently. We support the fact that there is that shortage occupation list. We will want to ensure that it is populated in the most timely manner possible. We would like it to be an iterative list so that it can be changed over time as opposed to being stuck in time. Certainly, the Department for the Economy will work with the Home Office to ensure that that list is put in place.

Refugee Integration Strategy: Update

5. Dr Archibald asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the refugee integration strategy. (AQO 226/17-22)

Mrs Foster: Work to develop the refugee integration strategy is under way. We are drawing on the excellent work, knowledge and experience that has been gained from successfully resettling a significant number of people under the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme. A two-day innovation lab on the long-term integration of refugees is being held with stakeholders next month, and the outcome will inform the final strategy, which will, of course, be consulted upon fully.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Minister for her response. Organisations such as the Red Cross and Barnardo's have done excellent work to support refugees and asylum seekers. As the Minister outlined, the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme has really informed the work that is being undertaken. Will she further outline the expected time frame for the consultation?

Mrs Foster: As I said, an innovation lab will take place, which will inform the strategy as it moves forward. That is a new and innovative way in which to look at the strategy. I welcome the fact that that is being done.

The Syrian scheme has worked very well. I well remember the very first Syrian refugees who came to Northern Ireland in October 2015. The then deputy First Minister and I went to welcome them to Northern Ireland. It is great to see that so many have integrated right across Northern Ireland, not just in pockets. To date, 1,818 refugees have been received here. The two-day innovation lab will look at how we plan for the long-term integration of refugees and interact with stakeholder groups that help them. The Member mentioned the Red Cross. There are many other groups as well. That outcome will inform the final refugee integration strategy, which, as I said, will be consulted on fully. It is a new way in which to do things, and it is one that I welcome.

Victims' Payment Scheme: Funding

6. Mr McGuigan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to identify the source of the funding for the victims' payment scheme. (AQO 227/17-22)

Mrs Foster: The victims' payment scheme policy and legislation was designed in Westminster. We are jointly of the view that the scheme should be funded from Westminster, and we continue to make that case. The Troubles permanent disablement payment scheme will provide much-needed support for those who have been left with life-changing injuries as a result of a Troubles-related incident. It is not possible for the costs of the scheme to be absorbed into existing budgets. The Finance Minister has met Her Majesty's Treasury and noted that the source of funding must be confirmed urgently.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that answer, what discussions has she had with the NIO to ensure that it meets its obligation for the victims' payment scheme?

Mrs Foster: This will be a continuing conversation with the NIO. I met the new Secretary of State for only about 20 minutes on a party-to-party basis; it was not through the joint office. We will seek to meet the new Secretary of State about the matter. Normally, a business case that sets out estimated costs would be developed alongside the policy and legislation. As that work has not been undertaken, the Executive Office now has to work on it to develop the likely costs. I know that some colleagues in the Executive Office Committee are questioning and asking about the costs, but we have to try to work out the costs without a business case and are trying to make guesstimates about where we are going to be on those issues. We will continue to engage with the NIO.

Ms Armstrong: I, like the First Minister, share concerns about where the money is coming from. Have there been

any discussions about which Department will take forward the scheme, given that it is, effectively, a pension scheme?

Mrs Foster: Yes, it is effectively a pension scheme. There have been some initial discussions involving, I think — I do not have the briefing in front of me — the Department for Communities and the Department of Justice; those two Ministries have been involved in the initial discussions. Those are the sorts of issues that we really have to get to grips with very quickly if we want the scheme to be up and running within the appropriate timescale.

Mr Clarke: I am sure, First Minister, that you share my enthusiasm that we have, at last, got something for innocent victims and survivors. Some of the questions have focused on budgetary aspects. When do you think that the first payments to the innocent victims will start rolling out?

Mrs Foster: We have a timescale; I think that the aim is to implement this by the end of May of this year. That is a very challenging timescale. Of course, officials will work to try to deliver on that. We anticipate about 2,000 recipients, but, again, we will not be clear until people start coming forward when the scheme opens. The payments will be between £2,000 and £10,000 per annum, but, due to backdating, costs will be initially high and then will taper off to a certain level. We have a lot to do on the scheme, but, as I said in my substantive answer, we jointly take the view that, because it is a Westminster policy — it was designed at Westminster — the funding should come from Westminster to deal with it.

Mr Beattie: Minister, as you know, many of the innocent victims and survivors suffer psychological injury. Some of them have been told that they will not be eligible for the scheme because they were not present when their loved one was murdered. Will you engage with the Victims and Survivors Service to clarify that and ensure that the information that it is giving out does not meet that?

Mrs Foster: Again, the eligibility was set by the Westminster Government. My officials are working through the eligibility issues at the moment. The Member mentioned one that I know will be of concern to many. Indeed, we are looking at whether that is something that can be dealt with in a discretionary way by the board. It is all at a very early development stage. I am sure that the Victims and Survivors Service will be happy to engage with any of the groups or, indeed, individuals who want to make representations about the matter that he raised.

T:BUC: New Strategy

7. **Ms Flynn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their commitment to developing a new Together: Building a United Community strategy to replace the current strategy when it ends in March 2021. (AQO 228/17-22)

Mrs Foster: The Together: Building a United Community strategy, published in May 2013, reflects the Executive's long-term commitment to building a more united and shared society. The New Decade, New Approach deal reaffirmed our continued support for the strategy.

Ms Flynn: In my West Belfast constituency, the Colin area has benefited greatly from the Urban Villages initiative in the T:BUC strategy. Does the Minister believe that the

delivery of the T:BUC strategy is improving community relations?

Mrs Foster: I absolutely do. Sometimes, it is hard to quantify the impact that the T:BUC strategy has had, because it is difficult to measure when people are integrating in a more serious way than they did in the past. We have made significant progress on a range of headline actions. The Member mentioned Urban Villages. Colin is one Urban Villages area. The others are EastSide; Ardoyne and Ballysillan; the Markets, Donegall Pass and Sandy Row; and the Fountain and Bogside in Londonderry. All have had a lot of funding, and much progress has been made in all of those areas.

We have the T:BUC camps programme, with over 20,000 taking part in 570 camps since 2015. That has been a huge success with all of those young people. We also have 10 Shared Neighbourhoods, which is a housing project; Uniting Communities through Sport and Creativity; and the Peace4Youth programme. One of the areas in which we would like to see more progress is the shared education campuses programme. That has taken a little bit more time than we would have liked, but we hope that progress will be made in the near future.

Mr McNulty: A few weeks back, I was lucky to be at the T:BUC Uniting Communities through Sport and Creativity event in the Armagh City Hotel. It was attended by Ulster GAA, the IFA, the IRFU and the PeacePlayers, amongst others. Will the First Minister give her assessment of how successful that programme is? Are there any plans to continue or increase funding to that programme?

Mrs Foster: We intend to continue with the programme. I am very pleased that the Member had the opportunity to see it for himself. Sometimes, Members hear about programmes in the House but do not experience the ways in which they make a difference, particularly to young people. I am pleased to hear that the Member took the opportunity to go down and see what goes on.

Uniting Communities through Sport and Creativity uses sport, physical and creative activity to break down divisions and deliver good community relations. It is not about people saying that something is not for them or that something does not belong to their community, so they will not engage. It allows people to be proud of their sport and to share that pride with young people who might have never engaged in it. That is really positive and really good, and we hope that it will continue.

Mr Speaker: I call John Blair, with one minute on the clock.

Mr Blair: Given the need to address the needs of all communities, not just two communities, will the previous T:BUC strategy be subject to independent audit and assessment?

Mrs Foster: I am sure that, like all of our programmes, it will be subject to independent audit. It can be difficult to put into value-for-money terms the impact that such schemes have had on different communities. I agree with the Member, of course, that it is not just about the two communities. It is also about our newcomer communities and making sure that they feel integrated and that there is an increase in respect for each other. It is about an increase in shared space that people feel comfortable with

and an increase in reconciliation, which is what we all want to see.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to topical questions. Question 8 has been withdrawn.

2.30 pm

Maze/Long Kesh Development

T1. **Mr Catney** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that they recognise the potential of the Maze/Long Kesh site, as stated in their written answer to his question, whether, albeit that there is no agreement on the site's future, they have had any conversations with each other to try to come to an agreement. (AQT 161/17-22)

Mrs Foster: As the Member said, we absolutely recognise the potential of the site. Previous Ministers in this Office recognised the potential of the site as well, and we hope to see a resolution so that the site can be developed. I know that the issue is something that the Member's city council is keeping a very tight eye on, and it will want to see the site developed. Of course, the timeline for development will depend very much on whether we can reach resolution around the huge issues with the site. He will be aware of the history of the site and of what happened there, but it is important that we try to move forward.

Mr Catney: First Minister, is it fair for me to ask that both you and the deputy First Minister make a commitment to having a conversation about the future of the site and the economic corridor where it is situated? Yes, that conversation should take into account the site's historical significance.

Mrs Foster: Yes, we will be having conversations about the site, because, as we have acknowledged, it has huge potential. It is a question of whether we can find a way through what are very difficult issues. It is important that all the stakeholders be brought along with us. On the previous occasion, people felt that they were not involved in discussing the site's development. They felt excluded and were concerned about what was going to happen at the site. There is very much a case to be made for the discussion being an inclusive one, and, if we can, one that brings everybody along with us.

NDNA: UK Government Commitments

T2. **Mr M Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions have been taken to ensure progress on the UK Government's commitments in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. (AQT 162/17-22)

Mrs Foster: As the Member will know, the United Kingdom Government made a large number of commitments in New Decade, New Approach. We have mentioned some of them today around the centenary, and there are also commitments around previous agreements, economic commitments and financial commitments. We will be engaging with the Northern Ireland Office to take forward those commitments to make sure that they are delivered on.

Mr M Bradley: Does the First Minister share my view that early delivery on those issues will build confidence and help to stabilise the Assembly and the Executive?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I absolutely agree with that. We as an Executive have tried as far as we possibly can to deliver on what was allotted to us in New Decade, New Approach. We have later today a debate on the legislative programme, which was to be brought at a particular time, and we tried to make sure that that happened. It is incumbent on the United Kingdom Government to make sure that they follow through on the various commitments that they made to Northern Ireland, which are contained in annex A of 'New Decade, New Approach', so that we can all move forward and stabilise the Assembly and Executive.

Coronavirus

T3. **Mr K Buchanan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work in the Executive Office and the other Departments in relation to coronavirus and how it has developed over the past few days. (AQT 163/17-22)

Mrs Foster: I am very pleased to tell the House that we have had a very close working relationship with the Minister of Health since coronavirus became an issue. On Saturday, the deputy First Minister, the Health Minister and I held a conference call with the Taoiseach, his Minister for Health and the Chief Medical Officer in the Republic of Ireland, because, of course, our designated case came through Dublin Airport. We therefore wanted to make sure that the protocols that were put in place are working, and they are. It is very good to hear that. The conference call was also to make sure that we have close cooperation and continued conversations about the issue as times moves on.

Mr K Buchanan: Can the First Minister give us an update on how the joined-up approach between the Northern Ireland Assembly, other regions and COBRA all link together?

Mrs Foster: As well as speaking to colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, the deputy First Minister and I joined a COBRA conference call today with the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly, the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister of Health. I am sure that when the Minister of Health gives his response to the question for urgent oral answer later, he will give more details of that, but suffice it to say, it is important that we continue to support the Health Minister and all our Executive colleagues because this is becoming an issue not just for him but for the whole Executive as to how we move forward. Earlier today, our civil contingencies were put in place. They are now being called together and are in operation because we want to make sure that the Executive are ready to deal with whatever comes to us in relation to the coronavirus, COVID-19.

RHI Report

T4. **Mr Muir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to address the Assembly about any issues that arise from the renewable heat incentive (RHI) report, which is to be published on Friday 13 March. (AQT 164/17-22)

Mrs Foster: As I understand it, the report will go to the Department of Finance on the Thursday or Friday, I am not sure which. I understand that Mr Justice Coghlin will make an announcement on the afternoon of 13 March. We will then consider that report, and I further understand that the

Minister of Finance will come to this place and answer any questions in relation to that.

Mr Muir: Does the First Minister not agree that it is important that the first comments and response from the leaders of our Government will be in this place and that they will be able to answer questions from MLAs in this Chamber?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, it is a public inquiry entirely independent of government. The Finance Minister in post at the time gave the terms of reference and asked for the inquiry. Therefore, it is important that he is given his place. The report will come back to the Department of Finance. I am sure that there will be ample opportunity for me, the deputy First Minister and, indeed, anybody else to answer questions in relation to the inquiry, as it is quite a long report, I understand, although I have no knowledge of what will come forward in relation to a wide range of issues. I am sure that we will be before this House to answer questions in relation to that matter.

Veterans

T5. **Mr Frew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions and consultations they have had with the British Government to determine the time frames and processes that need to be set out for the provisions for veterans in Northern Ireland. (AQT 165/17-22)

Mrs Foster: There is a wide variety of matters that are not the responsibility of the Executive but are the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government in relation to the issues that the Member raises. Therefore, we will want to ensure swift delivery. We welcome the commitment by Her Majesty's Government and, indeed, the Ministry of Defence to work with us, but we will need to see timescales and structures put in place, and we will work to ensure that those come forward as quickly as possible.

Mr Frew: As the military covenant and other provisions talked about have to be implemented by Departments, and given the public utterances by some Sinn Féin Members that they do not support the implementation of the armed forces covenant, how can the Executive assure me that the armed forces covenant will be implemented and that the veterans of Northern Ireland will receive the provisions that they deserve?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, the veterans' commissioner will be appointed by Her Majesty's Government. It will be part of the work of the veterans' commissioner to make sure that veterans' voices are heard at the heart of government here in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom. I see that as a very important appointment to give veterans a voice. We look forward to that appointment being made in the near future.

Irish Language Legislation: Cost

T6. **Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to look the people of Northern Ireland in the eye and tell them why, in their view, they need Irish language and other such legislation, at a cost of £11 million a year, more than they need the extra 275 nurses that such expenditure would obtain. (AQT 166/17-22)

Mrs Foster: Of course, it is not an either/or situation. The Member well knows that New Decade, New Approach was come to by the Government and was a basis for

moving forward. The costs that have been set out, which have been the subject of much discussion here and in Committee, are only a marker. Of course, I expect that the actual costs will prove to be much less. The reason that those costs have been put forward is that they are an estimate. They have been arrived at by looking at other commissioner offices to see in what way things can move forward. Officials have been working on the basis of comparisons with bodies such as the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission, and I do not think that it will necessarily be reflective of the offices that we are talking about putting in place. Therefore, I think that his worst fears will not be realised, and maybe he will be very disappointed about that.

Mr Allister: The First Minister said that they are only estimates, but they are her estimates. They are estimates that her officials, on her behalf, placed before the Executive Office Committee, and they are the only estimates that we have. It is surely not true to say that it is not an either/or situation. It is resource money, and therefore a choice is made. Do you spend £11 million on extra nurses as a resource, or do you squander it on the Irish language? That is the choice that the First Minister is making.

Mrs Foster: I have to say that there are many things that I would not spend money on in Northern Ireland, but unfortunately we have to spend it because there is a commitment to do so. I have to say that it is not just about the Irish language. There is also a British commissioner, and I am disappointed that the Member does not think that it is worthwhile having a commissioner to enhance British identity in Northern Ireland. I certainly think that it will be a good thing for those of us with a British identity to have that put in place. There is also the office of identity, which will be there to try to deal with some of the issues that have developed over the past number of years and to help newcomer communities to come into Northern Ireland.

I remind the Member that it was a Minister from this side of the House who brought about more nursing places for Northern Ireland over that period. More nurses were put in place. He should not play politics with nurses. It is very, very poor form indeed, but the Member will continue to do what he always does.

Victims' Payment Scheme: Cost

T7. **Mr Sheehan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an indication of the estimated cost of Westminster's victims' payment scheme and to state who will carry the burden of that cost. (AQT 167/17-22)

Mrs Foster: The Member may not have been in the House when I answered the question earlier, but it is, again, a guesstimate, and is based on the fact that we have been unable to develop a business case alongside the policy and legislative development, because it was policy and legislation that was developed at Westminster. We are now trying to put in place a guesstimate for the Committee. We are doing that as best we can, but recognise that it will only be a guesstimate at this stage.

Mr Sheehan: The First Minister could take account of previous payouts and use them as comparators. For example, the PSNI hearing loss claim is running somewhere between £160 million and £180 million, and the estimates for the historical institutional abuse compensation scheme

are upwards of £600 million. Does the First Minister agree with me that the payout for the victims' payment scheme is likely to be much more than that?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated to the Member, our estimated costs are high-level at present. We need much further refinement, but we have based it on 2,000 recipients coming forward in 2020-21, which will amount to between £25 million and £60 million in implementation costs. For the purposes of financial planning, we have assumed a cost of £109 million, including implementation costs, over the three-year budget period.

We have put that forward to the Committee. I know that it is frustrating for the Committee that we do not have actual costs based on a business case, but that is the best we can do in the circumstance.

2.45 pm

Mr Speaker: We now move to questions to the Minister of Agriculture. I call Emma Sheerin.

Sorry, it is the Minister for Infrastructure.

Infrastructure

Speed Limits: Rural Primary Schools

1. **Ms Sheerin** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the review of the part-time 20 mph speed limit introduced outside seven rural primary schools. (AQO 237/17-22)

11. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the recent pilot scheme, what are her Department's plans for the implementation of reduced speed limits outside schools. (AQO 247/17-22)

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will address questions 1 and 11 together, as both relate to lower part-time speed limits outside schools.

As the Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. The targeted reduction of speed that traffic can travel at, particularly near schools, can go a long way to making our roads and communities safer; indeed, some of the key findings of the most recent Northern Ireland continuous household survey indicated that the majority of respondents — 53% — thought that a 20 mph speed limit should be more widely used, with 82% of respondents believing that a 20 mph speed limit should be applied outside schools and three quarters thinking that it should also be applied to an area where children play.

My Department is trialling an arrangement of signs that is intended to allow the introduction of more part-time 20 mph limits at schools. The trial has been under way since September 2018, and my officials are drafting a report on the findings of their review. I am expecting receipt of the findings of the trials in the next month or so, and I fully intend to see what potential there is to build on the work already undertaken.

Ms Sheerin: Given the anecdotal evidence that the Minister pointed to and her expectation that she would

have findings within a month, can we expect to see the part-time signage implemented across all schools in the North that are on national speed limit roads, particularly given the safety concerns of those schools?

Ms Mallon: The trial is analysing the effectiveness of the signs and looking for a more economical way of introducing signage that would allow us to extend the roll-out. I am keen to see it. Members of the public want to see it, as do Members across the House. As soon as I assess the findings and take cognisance of my budget, I would be keen to see it rolled out to many more schools,

Mr Clarke: I am sure that the Minister is aware that some schools have come up with their own imaginative ideas, such as school courts in conjunction with the PSNI, to bring in some of those speeders. Some of them speed within the 30 mph limits. The pilot scheme has been running for almost 18 months. Does the Minister share the frustration of others that that is a long time to get to the conclusion of what many of us see as a common-sense approach?

Ms Mallon: It is one of many areas where we are not, perhaps, as progressed as we would like. A lot of that has to do with having no Assembly or Executive in place to drive things forward. I have asked officials to bring to me the findings of that review.

The 20 mph limit is a good bit of the answer, but, like the Member, I agree that there are many initiatives in schools, such as the cycling proficiency scheme, the Active School Travel programme that my Department funds with the Public Health Agency (PHA) and that is rolled out by Sustrans, the learning resources that we apply in schools and the engagement with the PSNI that you reference. If we can bring all those things together, we can absolutely enhance the safety of children at school, and I think that we would all like to work towards that and to see it happen.

Miss McIlveen: Signage is clearly important, and I will continue to lobby for it in my area. However, to effect real behavioural change, we need to be much more effective in visible detection and enforcement. To do that, we need our police on the ground. What discussions has the Minister had with the Chief Constable on road safety?

Ms Mallon: I have requested a meeting with the Chief Constable, because, as Minister for road safety, I take my responsibilities for this very seriously. I will meet him in just a couple of weeks, and among the items we will discuss will be issues around detection. I want to have a discussion with him about drink-driving and drug-driving as well. I am keen to work with all partners, including the Chief Constable and the PSNI, on making our roads much safer.

Mr McGuigan: I welcome the Minister's commitment to additional signage and, indeed, to road safety. The Minister may have seen alarming dashcam footage over the weekend of a tourist travelling on the wrong side of the road for a number of minutes along the north Antrim coast. In light of that and other accidents in my constituency, does the Minister intend to place signage in tourist areas alerting drivers to drive in the left lane, as is the case in the South?

Ms Mallon: I have not seen the footage that the Member referred to, but I am keen to work with councils to put in improved signage to enhance road safety where and when it is needed. I am also mindful that the road safety

strategy runs out in December this year. I have already asked officials to start bringing me information, because I want to make informed choices so that we can have an effective road safety strategy with actions that not only are deliverable but can bring about a real change in road safety. For that, I mean issues from signage right up to, perhaps, legislative change and changes in penalties for very dangerous driving. I want to take a comprehensive and holistic approach.

Mr Butler: I thank the Minister for making road safety so important, and I welcome her commitment to be a road safety champion. Will the Minister prioritise the reform of policy on requiring statistics on accidents and injuries before changes can be made to main arterial routes?

Ms Mallon: Yes, I am happy to look at that, and, certainly, I can add it as an agenda item in my engagement with the Chief Constable. I am also happy to follow up with the Member afterwards if there are particular issues, aspects or solutions that you want to bring to my attention for me to try to progress.

Mr McNulty: I applaud the Minister for her efforts to improve road safety for all road users. Will the Minister join me in sending condolences to families from my constituency: the Faxton family, where a mother and son tragically lost their lives, and the Magill family, who were so tragically bereaved at the weekend?

Ms Mallon: I completely send my condolences and thoughts to the families of those who so tragically lost their lives on our roads this weekend, as I do to all families who have lost loved ones in that tragic way. Immediately on taking up office, I had the privilege to meet Mr and Mrs Heaney, whose son Karl tragically lost his life on the A1. Once again, I was struck by the dignity of those families, who have suffered horrendously, yet strive with such compassion and energy through their pain to prevent any other family going through what they have. That is why, for me, road safety is not just a priority on paper; it is something that I want to work hard at to make a difference.

MOT Exemptions

2. **Mr Harvey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on her Department's plans to introduce MOT exemptions for vehicles of historical interest, similar to recent exemptions in Great Britain. (AQO 238/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Member may be aware that, in 2014, the EU Commission published an EU directive that set out the standards for roadworthiness testing across the European Union. It included a number of compulsory provisions that had implications for motor vehicle testing across the UK. As part of that directive, member states were authorised to exempt vehicles of historical interest from roadworthiness testing if they were at least 30 years old, no longer in production and had not had substantial changes made to them. Before that, across the UK, only vehicles manufactured before 1960 were exempt from periodic testing.

In 2018, Great Britain, following a public consultation, introduced an exemption for vehicles that were manufactured or first registered no fewer than 40 years ago. That has led to a difference in how vehicles of historical interest are treated in GB and in Northern Ireland. My Department ran a consultation exercise in

2019 seeking views on whether the exemption should be introduced here, and I will consider all aspects of the issue, including the consultation responses, to help me decide how best to proceed. It is clear, given the volume of correspondence that my Department has received recently from political representatives and historical car enthusiasts, that there is significant support for a similar exemption here to the one introduced in GB in 2018.

I am aware of the Member's passion on the subject. He is a strong advocate for change. I assure him that I will examine the issue closely, and I hope to be in a position to update Members relatively soon.

Mr Harvey: I thank the Minister for her answer and for the correspondence and conversations that we have had to date. Now that we have a Minister in place and assuming that she has looked at the scheme and considered the completed consultation, will she advise the House of the timeline to implement the scheme, knowing the benefits of it?

Ms Mallon: As I said, I am going through all of the consultation responses. I am mindful that the majority of them are supportive of change, as are many Members. Members will be aware of the ongoing situation in our MOT centres and that I have said that we need to improve our MOT system. I am mindful that, in doing that, I should take cognisance of this issue. While I cannot give the Member a definitive time frame, I reassure him that I am actively considering it, and I want to be able to bring proposals to the House as soon as possible. I am also happy to meet the Member and any other enthusiasts he wishes to bring with him.

Mrs D Kelly: I have no doubt that the Minister will take the same swift action on that issue as she displayed in ordering lifts for MOT centres. I commend her for keeping drivers on the road through temporary exemption certificates (TECs). Is the Minister considering biennial testing, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for her question and her long list of compliments. Yes, I want to consider all options on how best to deliver vehicle testing services. No decisions have been taken, but I am looking closely at that option.

Mr Lynch: The Minister answered my question, which related to a timeline. She has no timeline at this stage.

Mr Speaker: Well done.

Mr Muir: Action on this will help the MOT situation. The MOT situation that Northern Ireland has endured over the past number of weeks has been nothing short of a debacle. Is the Minister prepared to ensure that all reports — investigatory and audit — are published in full so that the public can understand exactly what happened?

Ms Mallon: I was very clear when I became aware of the scale of the MOT situation that I would make four commitments to the public: to ensure the safety of DVA staff and customers; to do what I could to minimise the disruption to customers; to conduct two independent reviews to understand what happened and to best advise me, going forward, on how to get our MOT centres back and fully and safely operable as quickly as possible; and to look at what we could do to make sure that such a situation never happened again. The first of the independent reports was conducted by external independent engineers. The

executive summary of that report is on my Department's website. The second independent review is an audit review. It is to help me to understand what happened, who knew what when and what action was taken. It is being completed. Once it is complete, I will publish it on the departmental website. It is important that, as Ministers, we have full openness and transparency and that we clearly set out how we arrived at the situation and what steps we are putting in place to make sure that it is never allowed to recur.

Infrastructure Priorities: NDNA Commitments

3. Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she will ensure commitments made by the UK Government in New Decade, New Approach are reflected in her Department's priorities. (AQO 239/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since taking up post, I have made it clear that modern and sustainable water, drainage and transport infrastructure are key enablers of ensuring regionally balanced growth, improved connectivity and improved well-being for all. The projects highlighted in the New Decade, New Approach agreement will be transformational, and I intend to progress each of them as far as possible within my two-year tenure. However, in doing so, I must be mindful of the immediate need to invest significantly in our waste water, public transport and road infrastructure, which have suffered from a legacy of years of underinvestment.

Those are the building blocks that need to be in place if we are to take forward the Executive's wider commitments on health, housing, the economy and climate change.

3.00 pm

The extent to which I can progress the important projects is largely in the hands of the UK Government and the Executive's Budget. To that end, I met Minister Robin Walker and had a positive, helpful conversation with the Secretary of State for Transport. That is in addition to making several representations to our Finance Minister. In all those engagements, I sought reassurance on the priority of investment in our critical infrastructure. I am hopeful that the UK Government step up to meet their responsibility and commit the necessary funding required for the delivery of the New Decade, New Approach agreement. I hope that my Executive colleagues realise the need to show the public that we can deliver in this place and that they can help me to secure the funding required to invest in our critical infrastructure that will allow us to meet our ambitions collectively, delivering for people right across Northern Ireland.

Ms S Bradley: Does the Minister recognise that a critical piece of infrastructure for the South Down constituency is the delivery, finally, of Narrow Water bridge? Will she commit to visiting me and members of the Narrow Water Bridge Community Network, who are eager to see the project delivered as soon as possible?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. I certainly recognise the local support for a bridge at Narrow Water to link the communities on both sides of the lough and to take full advantage of the tourism potential in that cross-border area. I thank the Member for her invitation. I can confirm that, following her request, I will be coming to South Down on 18 March, when I will be delighted to meet her and members of the Narrow Water

Bridge Community Network to discuss the progression of the Narrow Water bridge project.

I know that the Member has been advocating for her community for some time and that she is determined to see progress made. I am keen to discuss the project with the incoming Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, and I am also keen to continue engaging with local communities as we firm up a proposal. It is very important to me that I fulfil my commitment to addressing regional imbalance, and it is important that we as an Executive deliver for the people of South Down.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister commit to making the maintenance of our roads a priority in the forthcoming year? Maintenance is an ongoing issue, especially resurfacing, weed control and street lighting. I extend my thanks to the Minister for her efforts to restore the 12,000 lights that have been out across the Province. That work is in progress, and I understand that contractors have now been tasked with getting on with the job.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. I firmly believe that, if we as an Executive do not get the basics right and do not show that we can make a change to people's daily lives, from fixing potholes to switching back on street lights, we cannot genuinely and with any validity ask them to have confidence in us to deliver on the strategic, visionary projects that we are all committed to. Going forward, I have been making representations to get right the big visionary stuff that is needed, but I also need to be able to maintain, and keep investing in, our public assets. That means our roads and our street lights. I am keen to work with Executive colleagues to make that happen.

Mrs Barton: Minister, we have an inadequate infrastructure maintenance budget for roads and street lighting and insufficient funds to provide a sewerage system that meets the current demand. Of course, public transport is, as you know, also under stress. Do you accept that it is irresponsible of politicians to make flagship capital commitments whilst failing to ensure that the basic infrastructure needs are addressed?

Ms Mallon: What we have to do is absolutely have ambition to deliver flagship projects that will transform lives, tackle regional imbalance and tackle the climate emergency, but, as I have said, we also need to do what people consider to be the basic things right. What I am keen to do, and I have made a number of representations to the Finance Minister on this, is to get the right resource budget and the right capital budget to be able to do both. I look forward to 11 March in Westminster, because we hear a lot from the British Government, and the Prime Minister in particular, about "turbocharging" infrastructure across the water. There is also a reference to "turbocharging infrastructure" in the New Decade, New Approach agreement, which the British Government have signed. There are many projects that I could be investing in, from roads maintenance to the modernisation of the public transport network. I look forward to the Barnett consequential that will come across so that I can try to do all those things to make a difference to people's lives.

Mr Gildernew: Will the Minister acknowledge that the projects that are identified in New Decade, New Approach do not represent an exhaustive list of the Department's priorities, as it should also strive to progress other vital

projects such as the A4 southern bypass and the upgrades to the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen road?

Ms Mallon: I recognise the very strong local support for a number of roads projects and the many benefits that they can bring. Ideally, I would like to be able to do all those things, but I have to operate within the practicalities and realism of a budget. I encourage the Member to make as many positive representations as possible to the Minister of Finance to help me deliver on many of the projects that he has cited. He is right; New Decade, New Approach contains a very ambitious infrastructure programme, but there are many other projects that are maybe not seen to be flagship but could make a difference in communities' lives, particularly in connecting them and addressing years of historical neglect. I am keen to work with the Finance Minister and all my Executive colleagues as we deliver on our Programme for Government.

Mossley West Railway Station: Parking

4. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on plans for additional parking at Mossley West railway station. (AQO 240/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since 2013, my Department has delivered an additional 3,400 bus and rail park-and-ride spaces across Northern Ireland. Those have proven to be highly attractive and have played a central role in the growth of passenger numbers on our rail services. In October 2018, my Department approved the business case for an additional 235 spaces at Mossley West. However, following a request from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, it became necessary to review that plan in order to incorporate links to the council's greenway strategy. While that has delayed the project, it should ensure a facility that better meets the needs, not only of those who drive to our park-and-ride sites but of those who walk and cycle.

It is exactly that more holistic and joined-up approach that I believe is essential if we are to encourage and enable more people to travel sustainably. The revised plans for Mossley West are now well advanced, and the land purchase is due to be completed by 31 March 2020. However, while I recognise the importance of park-and-ride facilities, the fact is that severe constraints on budgets over recent years have resulted in significant pressures across my Department. I have already stressed the need for investment in infrastructure to my Executive colleagues, and, as the Member will be aware, infrastructure is key to connecting our communities and it is the bedrock on which we should build our ambitions for the delivery of radical change to improve lives.

Mrs Cameron: The Minister will be aware of the very serious parking issues around the Mossley West area, especially at The Glade. It has been like that for many years and the extent of the problem is so serious that there are pensioners' bungalows that the emergency services cannot get access to. There is a real issue around parking and access to those homes. I very much welcome the additional parking spaces, for which I have been lobbying for many years. Will the Minister come and visit the area to see the situation for herself and take into account that any proposal coming through planning may have a detrimental effect on the residents and cause further traffic congestion, given that the area is also on a bus route?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. It is my understanding that, following representations from local councillors and MLAs, waiting restrictions were introduced in the immediate vicinity of Mossley West station in 2016, the purpose of which was to discourage all-day parking by commuters and, it was hoped, improve access for residents. I was not aware that there are continued significant issues there, so I am happy to take the Member up on her invitation, see it for myself and meet some of the residents. I suspect that the planning application will go through the local council, so I encourage the Member to keep an eye on that, and, hopefully, any issues can be resolved there.

Ms Anderson: Car parking is an issue for many across the North. I want to talk primarily about the train station in Derry and the north-west transportation hub phase 2. I know that you have budget limitations, and we all know that there is a £600 million hole in the Executive budget because of British cuts. Notwithstanding that, as the Minister, will you prioritise the train station in Derry for phase 2 of the north-west transportation hub that has to be completed by the summer?

Ms Mallon: One of my priorities is tackling climate change. I have been very clear that I believe that investing in the public transport network is key to that. I am on record saying that our rail network has been underestimated and underinvested in. I have also talked about the need to tackle regional imbalance, so I very much see rail projects in the north-west as hitting a number of those priorities. I am keen to get to the north-west to engage with local communities and see for myself. I want to do what I can within the two years and within the budget. I reassure the Member that, for all the priorities I have set out, I recognise the importance of this and want to do what I can.

Dr Aiken: I declare an interest as vice-president of Mossley Hockey Club. I would like her Department to ensure that, in the expansion of Mossley halt, a full consultation is carried out with the community, including the hockey club, on how traffic management will be conducted and, while expanding this great facility, how disruption to a long-suffering community will be diminished.

I would be delighted, along with Pam, to extend an invitation for you to visit both our club and our electric charging unit at the railway station, which you can plug your vehicle into, but it would be better if you came by train.

Ms Mallon: I am happy to take the Member up on his invitation when I am out in that direction, and to meet the hockey club. Of course Translink, in bringing forward this plan, should absolutely engage with and involve the local community to get a solution that meets the needs of most people in the area, if not the needs of everyone.

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for her answers in relation to this additional provision in my constituency, and for her reference to sustainable transport. Is this not the ideal opportunity, therefore, to look at expanding our railway provision, where that is achievable and sustainable, like, for example, at the Knockmore line to serve Crumlin in south Antrim and the international airport?

Ms Mallon: I am very much aware of the interest in rail generally, but also in the particular lines and routes that you referenced. Again, this comes down to, "Am I

prioritising public transport?”. Yes. “Do I see the huge potential in our rail network, not just in tackling the climate emergency but as a tourism offering?”. Absolutely. If we are serious about the modal shift of getting people out of their cars, we need to recognise that having a vibrant rail network is key.

As with all these things, the reality of having to operate within a budget that I have not caught sight of yet, but will, hopefully, have a clearer picture of in a few weeks' time, will necessitate that I have to have priorities and make difficult choices. I see our public transport network as about connecting people and tackling the climate emergency and regional imbalance. I genuinely want to do what I can to push that agenda forward.

Narrow Water Bridge

5. **Ms Ennis** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the Narrow Water bridge project is a priority for her Department. (AQO 241/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In the New Decade, New Approach deal, the UK Government committed to providing additional financial support for infrastructure delivery to enable the Executive to invest in a range of potential capital projects, such as Narrow Water bridge. As I said earlier, I met Minister Walker and our Finance Minister to discuss the issues that we face here and to seek reassurance as to the priority of investment in critical infrastructure. The Irish Government stated their readiness to jointly progress consideration of options for the development of the Narrow Water bridge project at the North/South Ministerial Council. As I said to Ms Bradley, I recognise the local support for a bridge at Narrow Water to link the communities on both sides of the lough and maximise the tourism potential of that cross-border region, whilst also protecting the area's natural environment of historic and ecological significance.

I will press to ensure that we can unlock the tourism potential of this cross-border region. I look forward to engaging with my counterpart in the South to discuss how best to achieve this in the Newry/Carlingford area.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Flooding: Boho, County Fermanagh

T1. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to address the flooding in bad weather in Boho in his constituency. (AQT 171/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Flooding in the Boho area of County Fermanagh usually occurs when water levels in the river there rise after prolonged and heavy rainfall. In the past, officials have considered a flood alleviation scheme for this area, which would involve the diversion of the river and improving the gradient in what is a flat and slow-flowing river. Unfortunately, the costs of this proposal far outweigh any flood alleviation benefits that would be gained. However, my Department has established a community resilience group in the Boho area to help residents to be more resilient to the impacts of flooding. Officials have also developed strong links with other response organisations and the voluntary sector to provide coordinated multi-agency support to individual properties or communities

that may be cut off by floodwater and require access to essential services.

Mr Lynch: I thank the Minister for her extensive answer. Does she understand the impact that it is having on day-to-day lives, particularly those of care workers?

Ms Mallon: I do indeed recognise the importance of that. Multi-agency coordination has been ongoing at a local level in relation to the impacts on residents, and as recently as Friday 28 February. A watching brief is ongoing and further calls will be held as required with participants from right across a number of sectors and partners. The Member will know — he has been advocating on the issue — that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council initiated a welfare assistance line to advise that, if there are instances where a carer is unable to access a client's home, they should contact their social worker. I am advised that no calls have been received to this helpline to date, but I am very conscious of the impact on carers.

School Bus Legislation

T2. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of his recent lobbying of her, whether she has considered introducing legislation that would prohibit vehicles from passing stationary school buses when children are getting on and off, and to note that, since he started lobbying her, he has been contacted by teachers from as far away as the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Canada where such legislation is in place and by a school attendant who helps children to cross the road. (AQT 172/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Yes, the Member has written to me on this matter on a couple of occasions. He has been examining best practice from across the globe and sharing that with me, which is very helpful. I also understand how important this is to you as it almost affected your two children, so the issue matters to us as parents as well as elected representatives. I can understand why schools are getting in touch with you about it.

I am reviewing the best practice that you shared with me. You will be aware of the number of road safety teaching resources that we apply to schools. We spoke earlier about the reduction in speed limits and so forth around schools. It is about seeing what more we can do on the issue. I intend to review the range of pressures across my Department and will consider my legislative programme accordingly. I want to consider a range of proposals to see what is doable within these two years. I am keen to continue engagement with the Member.

Mr McAleer: Earlier in Question Time, the point was made that we need to take steps here that improve people's lives. This is one such step, at minimal capital cost, which could be very important. Has the Minister had, or is she planning to have, any correspondence or communication with the Minister of Education on the proposed legislation?

Ms Mallon: To reassure the Member, yes. I have not had engagement with the Education Minister as yet, but I will engage with him and other ministerial colleagues as I start to formulate the road safety strategy. This is an area that I would like to consider as part of that, so, as well as engaging with Members, I reassure him that I will engage with the Education Minister on it.

Permitted Development Rights

T3. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will make a decision soon about the removal of permitted development rights for gas and oil exploration. (AQT 173/17-22)

Ms Mallon: This is an area of policy that has been impacted because we have not had an Assembly or a Minister in place. In June 2016, in response to a motion calling for the protection of Woodburn forest, the then Minister, Mark H Durkan, announced the intention to remove permitted development rights for petroleum exploration and to consult on proposals for legislative change. In December 2016, the public consultation, which was informed by responses received in an earlier call for evidence, proposed a number of options. I reassure the Member that I will be considering the responses to the consultation over the coming weeks.

Mr Boylan: Will the Minister outline how many sites are operating under permitted development rights?

Ms Mallon: I do not have that information to hand, but I will follow up in writing to confirm the number of sites with the Member.

A26: Junctions

T4. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given that she may be aware that the A26, especially the junction at Woodgreen, has blighted the lives of many, with death and serious injury due to road traffic accidents, whether the work that has been completed towards Ballymena at the Cromkill junction has been successful and could be replicated at the Woodgreen junction. (AQT 174/17-22)

Ms Mallon: A new regional strategic transport network transport plan, as it is very succinctly known, is being developed by my officials, and that will include proposals for future road improvement schemes. I will consider that in due course along with the other competing priorities. The Member referred to a particular road and junction, and I would be keen to have my officials meet him on-site and then they can feed back further information to me on it.

Mr Frew: That would be very helpful, Minister. I thank you for that commitment and I will contact your staff about that. There were plans to implement work at the Woodgreen junction, but that did not go forward because of legal challenges, or challenges that could have become legal. Can the Minister assure us that whatever is implemented or whatever is proposed to be implemented will be robust enough to be successful?

Ms Mallon: I absolutely support and defend people's right to challenge. I think, though, that we need to make sure that, when we are completing all the statutory processes on road schemes or junction work, everything is carried out as robustly as possible so that the decision-making process is robust and we can then get to a point where we are able to progress schemes. It is something that, as Minister, I am mindful of, and, as an Executive, we are mindful of it. I reassure him that there is thinking going on in the Department about those issues, and I am very clear that we need to make sure that all statutory and due processes are always completed to the highest standards to help protect against that.

Glider: North and South Belfast

T5. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given that he understands that the business case for the extension of the Glider route to include south Belfast and north Belfast will be submitted in the spring, when the consultation will begin to allow the purple Gliders to be extended across their constituency other than when they are coming or going to their station. (AQT 175/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I know that many in North Belfast are frustrated at the lack of progress on the extension of the Glider. The Member is correct that, as part of the Belfast regional city deal, the Gliders are being progressed. There is a business case being submitted, as he says, in the spring. I am keen to move to public consultation in the latter part of this year. That is where we can scrutinise a potential route in order to ensure that we make the right decision. I reassure him that, as I said, public transport and connectivity are important. Not many constituencies are as fragmented as North Belfast. We need to work together to change that.

Mr Humphrey: Connectivity is important. The Minister mentioned tourism in an earlier answer. Over the weekend, I visited the great city of Glasgow. The Minister will be aware of the difficulty with road connections between the ports of Stranraer and Cairnryan and Glasgow, and how that impacts on football supporters, travel, tourism and trade. Has the Minister met, or does she plan to meet, her Scottish equivalent in order to address those issues, which are so important to Northern Ireland plc?

Ms Mallon: I have engaged with my Scottish counterpart. We have begun a discussion on a number of areas. I look forward to meeting him in the not-too-distant future to discuss a range of shared concerns and a number of areas where we can work together. I am keen to add that item to our agenda when we meet.

Park and Ride: Moira

T6. **Mr Catney** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed car park at Station Road, Moira. (AQT 176/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The first business case to build a new park-and-ride facility at Moira station was approved by my Department in June 2016, but it could not proceed because negotiations to procure the land were unsuccessful. A new process was, therefore, undertaken, and a new business case that identified a new site was received in October 2019. It is anticipated that, when complete, the scheme will provide an additional 340 spaces. However, the procurement process to appoint a main contractor cannot commence until full funding is secured, planning approval obtained and lands acquired. Translink is preparing a full business case for the project. When the land purchase has been finalised, it will be submitted to my Department for approval. I will consider it in line with the budget and a number of competing priorities.

Mr Catney: There is no lighting for around three quarters of a mile along Station Road. Will the Minister give an update on lighting for that stretch of road?

Ms Mallon: I am aware of concerns about the lack of lighting along the stretch of road to which the Member referred. The difficulty is that the criteria on rural lighting, which I inherited, are very clear. Unfortunately, that stretch

does not seem to qualify. I am, however, keen to engage further with the Member to see whether there are other things that we could do to try to find a resolution. I hope that we are able to progress the extension of the park-and-ride facility there. Hopefully, that will take some pressure off the parking congestion and ease the lighting issue.

Flooding: Inter-agency Approach

T7. **Ms C Kelly** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's long-term plans for funding of an inter-agency approach, given that, during the recent flooding caused by Storm Ciara, an inter-agency tactical response team, comprising the Fire Service, the PSNI, DFI Roads, Rivers Agency and other relevant agencies, was active and was very effective because of the resultant coordinated approach. (AQT 177/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I put on record my appreciation and thanks to staff from my Department and all those agencies who worked together, and they have worked tirelessly because of the relentless flooding and storms over the past four or five weeks. My Department takes the lead on that work and works very well with other agencies. I want that to continue. Whether it is addressing flooding, gully cleaning or preventative work, it will be successful only if we all work in partnership. I want to play my part through my Department's facilitating, encouraging and promoting that partnership working right across the board with all stakeholders.

Ms C Kelly: Does the Minister agree that we need to fund best practice models to deal with flood risk in order to minimise the harm caused to communities by adverse weather events?

3.30 pm

Ms Mallon: Yes. Partnership working and the pooling of resource to try to deal with that are key. I am keen for my Department to play its part, working with other stakeholders.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for one moment while we change the top Table.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Stalford] in the Chair)

Ministerial Statement

Response to the Emergence of Coronavirus

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): I start by thanking the Speaker's Office and the Business Office for allowing me to make this urgent ministerial statement.

Further to my written statement on Friday on COVID-19, I wish to give Members a further update on recent local developments. As of today, 150 tests have been carried out, of which 149 were negative and one was positive. As Members may be aware, the Public Health Agency (PHA) has been publishing the number of tests done on a weekly basis. However, with recent developments, we are moving to twice-weekly updates. As such, further information on the number of tests carried out will be published again later this week.

The individual who had a confirmed positive result for COVID-19 on 27 February is receiving appropriate specialist healthcare, in keeping with expert advice and agreed procedures. I understand that the individual followed the public health advice and had self-isolated before seeking medical attention. I am sure that Members will join me in wishing them a speedy recovery. Contact tracing of those who came into close contact with the individual since their return from Italy was immediately undertaken by Public Health Agency personnel. I can confirm that that was completed on 28 February. Those requiring appropriate advice have been provided with it. I emphasise that members of the public who have travelled between Dublin and Belfast using public transport need not be concerned.

Once the details of the case were known, the Public Health Agency immediately contacted their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland to provide all relevant information regarding the person's movement while in Dublin. The case relates to travel to an infected area in Italy; it was not linked to a school ski trip. At this stage, we do not believe that there are any wider implications for children or schools. Across the United Kingdom, public health professionals are continuing to carry out enhanced monitoring of direct flights from areas such as northern Italy and Iran. Whilst the situation is, no doubt, serious and while it is far from certain that it will happen, detailed plans are in place in case of the virus becoming a pandemic. Even with the recent case, I stress that we are very much still in containment phase. We have been planning for the first positive case in Northern Ireland, and we have robust infection-control measures in place that have enabled us to respond immediately to this type of situation. Our health service is used to managing infections, and we are well prepared to deal with this. I assure members of the public that we are taking all necessary measures to minimise the risk to them.

As I have previously stated, it was not unexpected that, at some point, we would have a positive case in Northern Ireland. However, it is important that we continue to remain calm and focused on containment at this point. The risk to individuals in Northern Ireland has not changed at this stage. Based on the advice of the UK Chief Medical Officers, the risk to the UK remains at "moderate". However, we will continue to plan and be ready for all

eventualities. As Members will, no doubt, be fully aware, the virus has continued to spread to many countries and regions.

The Public Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 has been amended by my Department to make coronavirus disease — COVID-19 — a notifiable disease. I thank the Health Committee for its support in doing that last Thursday. The changes came into effect on 29 February 2020. On Friday, I updated the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. On Saturday, along with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, I spoke with the Taoiseach and the Republic's Health Minister, Simon Harris, about the case. We are all in full agreement that the relevant authorities, North and South, should continue to work closely with each other and ensure that any necessary actions in relation to the case have been fully completed.

Members will be aware that the first case in the Republic of Ireland was confirmed on Saturday. I understand that contact tracing of those who may have been in close contact with the individual is ongoing, but there are not believed to be any implications for Northern Ireland. The Health and Social Care Board have been liaising with their counterparts in the Health Service Executive in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that, where possible, both jurisdictions can make the best use of our collective resources when responding to COVID-19.

My advice to the public remains the same. I urge those members of the public who have symptoms and are concerned that they may have COVID-19 not to turn up at GP clinics or hospital emergency departments; instead, they should contact their GP or the GP out-of-hours service, and advice will then be given on the next steps, including testing, if required. I remind Members and the public that everyone can play their part. I encourage everyone to take sensible precautions by washing their hands regularly and especially to heed the advice recommended for similar illnesses such as cold and flu: catch it, bin it and kill it.

Northern Ireland now has full access to the NHS 111 helpline on the coronavirus. It is available 24/7 to provide advice. More general advice about the coronavirus is available at the Public Health Agency's website and NI Direct. As the situation develops, my Department and the Public Health Agency will continue to provide updated guidance to healthcare professionals and other Departments and their authorities, including schools, as and when necessary.

I remain in close contact with the other UK Health Ministers, and I will continue to take part in the weekly COBRA ministerial meetings to ensure that our joined-up approach to tackling the disease continues. I can also advise that, along with the First and deputy First Ministers, I participated in a COBRA ministerial meeting this morning that was chaired by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

My Department, including the health and social care system, has planned extensively over the years for an event like this and is therefore well prepared to respond in a way that offers substantial protection to the public. My Department has also contributed to the UK-wide coronavirus action plan that is due to be published by the UK Government tomorrow. The document sets out what the UK as a whole has already done and what it plans to do further to tackle the current coronavirus outbreak

on the basis of our wealth of experience of dealing with other infectious diseases and our influenza pandemic preparedness work.

The exact response to COVID-19 will be tailored to the nature, scale and location of the threat in the UK as our understanding of it develops. The document will set out what we know about the virus and the disease it causes; how we have planned for an infectious disease outbreak such as the coronavirus outbreak; the actions that we have taken so far in response to the current coronavirus outbreak; what we plan to do next, depending on the course that the current coronavirus outbreak takes; and the role that the public can play in supporting that response now and in the future.

Locally, the Health and Social Care Board is leading on surge planning, working with the health and social care trusts. That will be informed by our existing pandemic flu plans, which are in place across the health and social care sector. As I have previously advised the House, the regional virology lab in Belfast has been set up for the testing of COVID-19 since mid-February. All positive tests are sent to Public Health England labs for confirmation. My Department, the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board will continue to work closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to deal with the situation as events unfold.

Across the Northern Ireland Civil Service, planning has been stepped up to ensure a coordinated response from all sectors of government. I am aware that the Executive Office is leading the work on assessing essential services and key sector readiness and convened a cross-departmental meeting on 20 February where information on all possible eventualities was shared. All Departments were asked to review business case continuity plans. A tabletop exercise is planned in the coming days where our planning and preparation across government will be discussed. Internationally and in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, we remain in the containment phase of our response as we seek to prevent sustained community transmission.

Lastly, I thank all the staff who have been involved in dealing with the first confirmed case in Northern Ireland. Their professionalism and dedication is very reassuring. My priority as Minister is to ensure that all effective measures continue to be put in place in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, let me direct my comments beyond the House to the people watching at home and, indeed, to the media reporting on these proceedings. It is vital that we keep taking a balanced, proportionate approach at all times, with our actions based on the best scientific advice. Complacency is our enemy, but so are panic and hysteria. As we have said, we will continue to prepare for all eventualities. When the UK Government issue their action plan tomorrow, there will inevitably be intense interest in what kind of emergency measures may form part of our collective planning. These are measures that we will have in our toolkits to deploy only if required. "If required" are important words in that sentence. The emergency measures in the forthcoming UK Government action plan will apply to Northern Ireland if needed. It is normal practice to plan for worst-case scenarios. That does not mean that these outcomes are expected or likely. That is a really important point to underline.

Our primary focus remains on containment at this time and then to delay and mitigate. There are risks for society in taking premature actions that are not grounded in scientific advice. We have already heard fears being voiced about our economy and jobs, including in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Obviously, public health protection must come first, and I am sure that all Members will agree on that. However, premature actions in the current situation could also have impacts on our health. I am thinking of the risks from undue panic or hysteria and from social isolation as a result of social distancing.

Let me finish by saying that the people of Northern Ireland are a resilient people. I believe that they are well used to keeping calm during challenging circumstances. I believe that they will not be unduly influenced by rumour or fake news on the internet and that they will rely on the advice and guidance of our public health experts. That is what I am doing, and I believe that the Executive are 100% behind me in that approach. I believe that we should remain both vigilant and determined to tackle the virus with our well-developed plans in place. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Minister. I have an extensive list of Members who wish to speak. I want as many Members as possible to get asking questions of the Minister, so I remind Members to please ask questions and not make speeches.

Mr Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health): I thank the Minister for addressing the House on the issue. We know that it is a very fluid situation and that it can change multiple times over the course of a day, never mind over a weekend or week. I welcome the high-level activity across and between these islands over the weekend and the efforts of you and your clinical leadership team. In keeping with your comments, I acknowledge the efforts of front-line staff.

Given that we are such a small island and that North/South interconnections, travel and interaction are part of the social and economic fabric of this island, as the First Minister acknowledged in the Chamber earlier, will the Minister agree that maximum cooperation and coordination, similar to the weekly COBRA meetings, between the health services North and South is now not only beneficial but essential?

3.45 pm

Mr Swann: I thanked the Chairman of the Committee for his support in the statement. I also thank him and his Committee members for the support that they have given me and the Department in the past number of weeks, as we were preparing for how to tackle COVID-19.

Minister Harris and I have had very good communication in the past number of days. Unfortunately, due to the updated situation, the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, the Taoiseach, Simon Harris, our Chief Medical Officer, the Republic of Ireland's deputy Chief Medical Officer and I had an extensive telephone conversation on Saturday, and we agreed to continue that communication as and when necessary.

I put it on record that, although we have been involved in COBRA meetings at a UK level, the engagement between the Chief Medical Officers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has been second to none in

the past few weeks regarding how we prepare for this and regarding information sharing between the Public Health Agency and the HSE in the Republic of Ireland. At a professional level, engagement has been ongoing for some time, and that has proven beneficial in recent days. The continuation of the communication between us and the Republic of Ireland is guaranteed because it is in all our interests to work together to tackle this.

Mrs Cameron (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health): I thank the Minister for his statement. It is important that it has come to the House today. I put on record our best wishes to the individual who has had the one positive test to date and hope that that number stays relatively low in the near future.

I very much welcome full access to the NHS 111 helpline. What are the limits to and the nature of the information available through the NHS 111 helpline? How concerned is the Minister that people can be infectious before they become symptomatic?

Mr Swann: I thank the Deputy Chair and place on record my thanks to her for supporting the work that we have been doing. I will take her last point first on people being infectious before they become symptomatic. At present, research indicates that COVID-19 is being spread by droplets. It is spread when people cough or sneeze, so it is unlikely that someone who is asymptomatic will spread the disease. It is believed that, to become infected, someone would have to be face-to-face or have a face-to-face conversation with someone who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes. It is that period of engagement.

The NHS 111 service has been put in place by the Department of Health in consultation with the Public Health Agency. I was keen to enhance local helpline provision in light of the increased level of public queries about coronavirus and had asked officials to explore the option of Northern Ireland having access to NHS 111 for that purpose. I am pleased that that was achieved so quickly by departmental officials and the PHA working over the weekend. I thank the staff who worked to bring that about in such a short time. It means that people in Northern Ireland will have access to the same level of advice as citizens in England, but, for medical advice and guidance, they will still be referred back to calling their GP. Initially, NHS 111 will provide coronavirus advice and guidance, not medical guidance; it is initial information that will be given.

Mr McNulty: I express my sincere thanks to those in the health service and the Public Health Agency for their work on the issue so far. Will the Health Minister confirm that we have a suitable quantity and quality of testing kits to ensure that we can properly and efficiently diagnose, given the bizarre circumstances whereby the United States did not and given that people will want to be reassured swiftly in the case of suspecting a contraction?

Mr Swann: At present, in Northern Ireland, we can carry out 32 tests a day. We are looking at the feasibility of increasing our capacity to be able to complete several hundred tests a day. All positive results will still be sent to a reference lab in England for confirmation. No matter where it has been tested initially, we always look for that second reference before we declare a positive case, but we react on the presumptive positive. If we get a result in Northern Ireland that indicates a positive test, we will take immediate steps before we wait for the second test.

On testing kits, testing is done in a lab, so it is about how we scale that up. That is what we are looking to do. There are 14 centres across the United Kingdom, with the Belfast virology lab being one, so we have that ability in Northern Ireland.

Ms Bradshaw: Minister, you talked about appropriate specialist healthcare. Will you outline what exactly that means and who is providing it? If this becomes a more serious issue, what will you do to ensure that there are adequate staff in place given the other pressures in the health service?

Mr Swann: The healthcare is that provided by our health service in Northern Ireland. As the Member may be aware, we have an established infectious disease control facility in the Royal. It has been there a long time, so we have professionals staffing it and scaling it up.

As the number of incidents and positive cases increase, we have a surge plan in place. That plan has been developed with the Health and Social Care Board, working with the Public Health Agency and trusts. That will mean that, as coronavirus and the positive number of cases expand, we will have the capacity in the system to manage them. At some point that may — I say “may” — result in us having to scale back other parts of NHS delivery, but we are not at that stage yet. I do not want to concern people that this will bring the NHS to its knees in a very short space of time. It will not, because our Health and Social Care Board, our Public Health Agency and our trusts are preparing for those surge plans. Across our system, we have a number of negative pressure rooms that are our initial response to locating a positive patient. As numbers increase, we will look to not only expand the use of those rooms across the whole of Northern Ireland but to cohort patients and designate wards, especially for coronavirus-positive patients.

As I have said, one of the things that impressed me last week was that, with all the preparations, briefings and guidance that we have been doing across our system, when we needed to use it last Friday, it came into play and our health service professionals came into their own. That is one of the things. The Chair of the Health Committee, the vice chair and I have commended and given recognition to the contribution of those who work in our health service and who come into their own in cases like this.

Mr Robinson: Will the Minister give an assurance that staff and visitors are following the correct hand-washing or hand-cleansing protocols to minimise the spread of infection in hospitals and other health facilities in Northern Ireland?

Mr Swann: The Member makes a valid point. As I said in my statement, it is one of the things that we can all do to prevent contamination. I have heard it said that, if you wash your hands with warm water and soap, it is as effective as any other chemical or sanitiser out there. The guidance is to wash your hands for over 20 seconds, but it is not just about washing the same part for 20 seconds; there is a detailed regime that Members should follow, and, I think, that has been made available online. I would recommend handwashing. The recommended time is 20 seconds, and, apparently, that is the equivalent of singing ‘Happy Birthday’ twice or ‘The Alphabet Song’. Other songs are available, I have been advised [*Laughter.*] The

Member makes a valid point, and it is not one that I want to take lightly. Everybody has a part to play in how we come together to tackle the spread of COVID-19.

Ms Flynn: I know that the Minister has updated Members on a few occasions on developments on the coronavirus, which I thank him for doing. Will he identify what steps he has taken to ensure that Departments and the public are fully informed on the guidance and the steps to take? I know that the Minister mentioned the cross-departmental meetings and another meeting that has been planned. Have any specific steps been taken to help inform the public and the other Departments about what they can do practically to deal with this?

Mr Swann: Since coming into post and in the current situation with COVID-19, I have noticed the level of work that goes on behind the scenes, often unnoticed, in the Department of Health. We should be cognisant of that, especially now.

Our Chief Medical Officer has been briefing the royal college. He had a conference call on Friday with principals of schools that had gone or planned to go on trips. We have been meeting at departmental level. The multi-agency civil contingency group, which involves a cross-sector of public bodies in Northern Ireland, met on 20 February. This morning, the Executive Office indicated that there will be a civil contingency group that brings together representatives of every Department in one room so that we can monitor and share best practice across all Departments.

To inform members of the public, we share updates on social media and TV. I am sure that my statement will be broadcast widely. However, as I said in response to the Member for East Londonderry, we all have a part to play. It is about sharing handwashing best practice and making the public aware that, when contacting GPs, it should be by phone. Do not go to a GP practice. Do not turn up at an emergency department. Use the plans and procedures that we have in place, because, to date, they have worked. However, it also involves buy-in and support from the general public.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for the work that he has done. What discussions has he had with the Finance Minister or with the First and deputy First Minister on the potential for more funding if a pandemic occurs?

Mr Swann: That very good point was raised at the Executive this morning. In 2009, I think, the Department received an extra £55 million to tackle swine flu. If we reach that level of infection, the money that will be spent across the UK means that Barnett consequential will come to us, and we will make sure that the money comes to the Department of Health to tackle COVID-19. From the support and response that I have had from ministerial colleagues, I do not doubt that that will be so.

I am led to believe that a contingency fund sits in Westminster, and, in cases such as this, each Department gets to bid for that money. That was raised at the COBRA meeting this morning, and the Executive will have the option to bid should the need arise for more finances. In tackling COVID-19, we need not worry about finance; we need to be sure how we tackle it.

Ms Dolan: I thank the Minister for his statement and commend his Department on its communication. I, too, wish the infected individual a safe and speedy recovery.

I am sure that the Minister will share my appreciation of all healthcare workers, including those in GP surgeries and community pharmacists, who work daily in the health service to provide these services. Will the Minister provide reassurance that there are sufficient stocks of personal protection equipment (PPE) in the North to deal with an outbreak?

Mr Swann: In line with agreed procedures, I can confirm that front-line Health and Social Care, GPs and pharmacists will have access to appropriate personal protection equipment, as and when required.

When we were looking at a no-deal Brexit, the Department of Health stockpiled a number of essential medicines and various items. Other jurisdictions looked to discharge their stockpiles. We did not, and we will not do so now. Therefore, we have in place stockpiles of essential medicines and PPE. We will distribute it as and when required.

Mr Beggs: The UK's NHS model of giving free health advice brings advantages. Does the Minister accept that it is very positive that we have the free 111 service and free access to our GP? That should give us an advantage, perhaps over some countries that charge for such access, in trying to control the outbreak.

4.00 pm

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his support of the National Health Service, because access to free medical advice at the point of need, whether at the end of the telephone or in person, remains a cornerstone of Northern Ireland.

I cannot stress this enough: if you have COVID-19 symptoms, please do not go to your GP or the emergency department. Phone your GP first, and if testing is necessary, that will be arranged. The Member makes a fair point. Our National Health Service comes into its own, not just because of its structure but because of the people whom we have working in it. We can rely on them at this time. As the situation develops, their professionalism should not go unnoticed, no matter what level of the health service they work in.

Mr Givan: In his statement, the Minister referred to UK-wide emergency powers that will be revealed tomorrow as part of the action plan. Is he in a position to advise the House what discretionary powers are expected to be taken by Departments in order for precautionary measures to be actioned in the worst-case scenario, which may well have been modelled? I note that the Health Secretary indicated at the weekend some of the measures that may need to be taken for schools and large events. Is the local Health Minister in a position to advise the House of any more detail in advance of tomorrow?

Mr Swann: As I briefed earlier, and this was in my statement, what the document will set out tomorrow is the steps that might be taken. I am not going to go into any detail on what we have specifically put into it. There have been high-level discussions about the action plan, and it is the action plan that will be published tomorrow. There is no indication of additional legislation being introduced,

although that is what we have done in the Assembly. Last week, we used an SL1 to make COVID-19 a notifiable disease, and I thanked the Health Committee in my statement for its support in doing so.

Tomorrow's plan will concentrate on what we are planning to do next, depending on the course that the current coronavirus outbreak takes, and on the role that the public can play in supporting the response now and in future.

Ms Mullan: Like others, I reiterate my good wishes to the individual concerned. I thank the Minister for his update. As Deputy Chair of the Education Committee, I ask him to ensure that he does all that he can to keep schools and parents updated, including providing advice on school trips and returning from trips. Parents and schools are rightly anxious, and I ask that you keep the situation under constant review.

Mr Swann: The Member's point is well made. As I said earlier, our Chief Medical Officer briefed, by conference call, a number of school principals on Friday on exactly those points. I spoke to the Education Minister this morning, because I am aware that the Department for Education in England has set up a specific advice line for schools. At this time, I say this to schools and principals in Northern Ireland: if they have a concern, contact the PHA with their queries, because that is where our advice and best-practice guidance is coming from.

The avenues for information are there. We will scale up that information and get it out to the Department of Education if that becomes necessary, but it is something that we are cognisant of, especially for school trips. We know that until the Foreign and Commonwealth Office declares an area out of bounds there are financial implications for schools from cancelling trips, because insurance companies will not pay out until then. Boards of governors and school principals have taken decisions to cancel school trips on their own, but I advise them always to be aware of the health guidance that comes out of the Public Health Agency.

Mr Lyttle: As Chair of the Education Committee, I thank the Health Minister for the engagement that he has had with the Minister of Education. Have specific contact details for the PHA been provided to all schools in Northern Ireland?

Mr Swann: The contact details of the PHA are widely available. I am not sure whether they have been conveyed specifically to all schools, but, following the Member's query, I will ask.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement and for his efforts to date on this difficult issue. Can the Minister clarify the advice that has been given to GPs by trusts? I understand that they have been told that they need to wear protective clothing, including masks, before dealing with high-risk patients. It is also my understanding that GPs were told that the trusts would supply such equipment, but that has not happened to date.

Mr Swann: I repeat to the Member that the guidance that has been given to the public is that they should not go to their GP practice: they should telephone their GP practice. It is important that I repeat that advice and guidance in response to the Member's query. If people have symptoms of COVID-19, they should telephone their GP, not turn up at a GP practice or emergency department.

The Member asked about the supply of personal protection equipment (PPE). It will be provided to GPs, and they will have access to it as and when required. However, I stress this to the public: if you have symptoms of COVID-19, do not turn up at your GP practice or emergency department. It is a matter of phoning them and making contact, and if testing is required, you will then be advised to go to one of the testing points rather than to a GP practice.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers to the questions thus far. I concur entirely with what the Minister has said about the fine line that we must tread between vigilance and panic. Communication is key to doing that. Is there a bespoke communication plan for the groups of patients with perceived vulnerability or underlying conditions? Or, must they, like the rest of us, rely on going to the PHA website for updates?

Mr Swann: The Member's main point is on whether we have specific guidance for patients with an underlying health condition. At this time, we do not, because we do not know how COVID-19 reacts with certain underlying medical conditions. We know that it is especially virulent — especially bad — for those of a certain age and with specific underlying health conditions, but we have not broken that down into specific causes or conditions. We know that COVID-19 presents as a potentially more significant threat to people with respiratory diseases. I am not aware of specific guidance, but someone will ask the PHA if we have it. If it is available, we will make it available. I say this to the people: in the first instance, go to the PHA website for advice and guidance, and if you think you are symptomatic, call your GP.

Mr Allister: The Minister's statement refers to the emergency measures that will be forthcoming in the action plan tomorrow. It says that they will apply to Northern Ireland. Does that mean that any changes in legislation will apply automatically to Northern Ireland as a UK-wide Act? Does it mean that if any measures are taken, for example stopping large gatherings, they will apply automatically, or will you or your colleagues have discretion in that regard?

Mr Swann: We have been inputting to the final document, as have the other devolved nations, that is being finalised at this time. The COBRA meeting that we had this morning included the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, as well as our First Minister and deputy First Minister. My understanding is that the action plan that will be developed tomorrow will lay out a number of options and guidance. If legislation is required, we will do all that is necessary to provide for, and prevent the spread of, COVID-19 in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom.

Mr Carroll: I thank the Minister for his statement and join him in wishing a speedy recovery to the member of the public who contracted the virus. Does the Minister agree that people who are forced to take time out of work due to containment should not be out of pocket or financially penalised for doing so?

Mr Swann: I know and fully recognise where the Member is coming from. That is not within my remit at this time. I want to make sure that I have everything in my toolkit and at my disposal to ensure that we can tackle COVID-19 so that it does not become a greater imposition on our society, our economy or our workers in the future, and to take steps now to contain it so that we do not have to go to the next phase.

Mr Chambers: Minister, I place on record my appreciation for the work that you, your Department and your officials have carried out so far in response to the threat of this virus. The Minister will be aware of the decision to postpone Ireland's Six Nations clash with Italy. What advice does he have for organisers of local events and fixtures here in Northern Ireland going forward?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his comments. On the decision to cancel the rugby, when I spoke to Simon Harris, the Minister of Health in the Republic of Ireland, I learned that it was not a decision taken easily. As we tackle COVID-19, we should be aware that it will be a marathon, not a sprint, because it will be with us for a period of time. What we will say is that organisers of all large-scale public gatherings and sporting events should be mindful of the latest public health advice available from the Public Health Agency's website. At this stage, I do not believe that there is any need to cancel local sporting events or public gatherings, but, based on updated scientific advice, that may need to be reviewed, and any decision to cancel events or mass gatherings will be assessed at the time, based on the clinical guidance available to me.

Ms S Bradley: I appreciate the Minister's replies so far and, like others in the Chamber, will try to keep to a calm narrative. The instruction is for people to contact the PHA and the website, but it is very much drafted for the individual. Will there be, or has the Minister given any consideration to having, clear contact points across Departments? For example, will leaders in our communities such as schools, the community pharmacy and nursing homes have a clear, accessible, informed contact point, via a Department, in case the PHA becomes a bit of a bottleneck for accessing information?

Mr Swann: In response to a previous question, I outlined how the multi-agency civil contingency group met on 20 February. The civil contingency action plan, which comes under the remit of the Executive Office, sets out how it will disseminate information across the Executive, all Departments and their arm's-length bodies. That is the next phase. It indicates what comes next in how we provide specific advice. Disseminating specific advice to every group and in every eventuality will take time, so, at this time, I recommend that people go to the Public Health Agency's guidance and see how it best fits their approach to their event. There will be concerns as they look to the future in how they organise events and make plans. The plan will be updated when we see how COVID-19 develops over the next days, weeks and months.

Ms Sugden: My apologies to the Minister and the Chair for missing the beginning of your statement. Given that this is a viral strain, I am not sure whether a vaccination is able to be developed. I am sure that the scientists in the House will be able to confirm that for me. I recall that, when there was swine flu, an antiviral medication was made available to front-line staff, the most vulnerable and those with autoimmune diseases. Again, I am not sure whether what was made available then is appropriate now. Have there been any thoughts about that? I understand that, at the time, a significant amount of money was required for that, and there were shortages, which is why they had to prioritise it. If we get to the point where something like that is necessary, has the Minister had any thoughts on how

we can ensure that we have the appropriate amount of provision?

4.15 pm

Mr Swann: I thank the Member. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine for COVID-19 at present. Coronavirus is so new and different that it will need its own vaccine. It is estimated that the first vaccine could be ready in the next year to 18 months, so we have to do everything today using the available weapons to fight the virus. Vaccines take time to create, because the virus needs to be studied while it spreads and potentially mutates, and it must be tested, first on animals and then on humans. On 3 February 2020, the UK Government pledged £20 million to develop new vaccines for epidemics, including vaccines against COVID-19. In the meantime, simple hygiene measures, such as washing your hands with soap and water often and avoiding people who are unwell and displaying COVID-19 symptoms, are the best preventative medicine that we have at the moment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister. I thank him for coming and taking the time to do so. Nineteen Members spoke in the debate.

The next item of business is the resumption of the debate on the motion on the legislative programme. I am due to speak in the debate, so I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments while we make changes at the Table.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Legislative Programme

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the Executive's legislative programme as presented by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in their statement of 11 February 2020. — [Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister).]

Mr McGrath: I thank the First Minister and deputy First Minister for tabling the motion and fulfilling the obligations placed on them in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document. It has been said before — it is worth repeating — that it is very welcome that we are back in this place, delivering legislation that will improve people's lives. That is not before time. Much of the legislation will be brought to the Executive Office Committee, of which I am Chair, for scrutiny. Committee members were interested to learn just when those elements of the legislative programme process might commence. Perhaps we could get some ballpark timings for the legislation, as that would certainly help the Committee's forward work planning.

I will make a few brief remarks on behalf of my party and my constituents in South Down about the legislative programme that the Executive intend to bring forward. I warmly welcome the swift action taken by the Communities Minister and her Executive colleagues in moving decisively to extend the welfare mitigations. The looming cliff edge at the end of March was causing fear and anxiety for families across the North, and it must be welcomed that those mitigations are to be extended. However, we must look at strengthening those protections and scrapping the most callous elements of welfare reform, including the two-child benefit cap. At a time when so many families are being pushed into hunger, poverty and despair, they should be able to look to our Executive and the Assembly to help them. It is right that we welcome the progress and the safeguards that were secured for our citizens, but it does not go far enough. The Minister must act to strengthen mitigations for families across the North, and I look forward to working with her and colleagues across the Chamber to deliver on that.

I welcome the housing (amendment) Bill, which will make changes and allow us to open up potential and capacity for our housing sector. I take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to the diligent staff who campaigned hard to deliver on this. I am sorry that the impasse means that it has taken us three years to deliver, but I am glad that we are finally here.

The other element of the legislative programme that I want to refer to is the licensing and registration of clubs (amendment) Bill. Many sectors were negatively affected by the political impasse and lack of legislation, none more acutely than the hospitality sector, which has been crying out for years for change. As Hospitality Ulster outlined, the local hospitality industry supports thousands of jobs, contributes £1.2 billion every year to our economy and is a cornerstone of our growing tourism industry.

The commitments in this programme are welcome, but they must be the first step on a journey to modernise

licensing laws and unlock economic growth across the North. There is a lot to welcome in the programme, therefore, it would be churlish not to do so. However, while we recognise that the Executive must be flexible and respond to urgent priorities, there is a lot we are missing.

Our public services are in crisis, and people are struggling to make ends meet across the North. They deserve an Executive and Assembly that do not merely exist but genuinely deliver. After three years of failed politics, people deserve the right to expect better. I recognise that this programme does not represent all the legislation that the Executive intend to deliver, but it is disappointing that there is no commitment to tangible action to address decades of regional inequalities and imbalance. That is felt acutely in my constituency of South Down, where, as my colleague Justin McNulty revealed last week, Invest NI brought precisely zero investors. Addressing the stark regional imbalance across the North has been a priority for the SDLP. That is why our key talks commitments included priorities such as the expansion of Magee. That was highlighted in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, and I believe it was even included in bold as a top priority for the Executive.

It is regrettable that tangible action is not included here.

Mr Speaker: The Member needs to conclude his remarks.

Mr McGrath: How much longer must communities outside parts of Belfast wait for their fair share? We must dream bigger and imagine more. I hope that this programme will allow us to do so.

Mr Nesbitt: I know that the deputy First Minister said that this was not the full legislative programme, so I will be brief. The welfare mitigation/social sector size criteria Bill will extend mitigation on the bedroom tax. The question on that is this: is that temporary or permanent? The answer, I guess, depends on plans for our social housing stock.

I get it that you should not be penalising somebody who is deemed to live in a house with too many bedrooms, when they are not offering them the choice of downsizing. That said, I question whether the bedroom tax is a good idea in principle. If you are building a social house, presumably you need a kitchen, a bathroom, a living area and a bedroom, so a second bedroom is a marginal cost that comes with significant advantages for the long-term usage of that property when the current occupants no longer need it. I look forward to a debate on that.

I note that the Finance Minister will reduce the normal Budget Bills. I am hoping that will be the last time a local Minister of Finance introduces a single-year Budget and that we will move swiftly to multi-year legislation.

The licensing and registration of clubs (amendment) Bill is an opportunity to recognise the growth of microbreweries across Northern Ireland, not least in my constituency of Strangford, and to deal with three points that they would like to see addressed. The fact that they are not allowed to sell online needs to be rectified, as does the need to sell on-site. I have had the pleasure of visiting taprooms in microbreweries in England. It seems to make enormous sense that local breweries should be offered that facility, and the ability to sell at markets, farm fairs and other events. There is a lot that can be done.

Reverting to housing, I should have said that the housing (amendment) Bill's reclassification of housing associations

to the public sector is to be welcomed, not least because it will significantly and positively impact on their ability to access and borrow more money and access financial transactions capital. As Minister Murphy made clear a couple of weeks ago, it is highly regrettable that we are returning £150 million of financial transactions capital to the Treasury because we were unable to allocate it.

The domestic abuse Bill is also to be welcomed, not least because it recognises that not all abuse in a relationship is physical. It will take account of controlling and coercive behaviour.

On legislation that will affect the work of the Committee that I sit on, the Committee for the Executive Office, amendments to the Northern Ireland Act make provision for the office of identity and cultural expression and the appointment of the various language and cultural commissioners. The point has been made that, when the Committee was briefed by officials, it was told that a budget of over £28 million had been set aside for the next three years. Apparently, however, this is indicative. I question what value you can place on such indications. Other issues in the briefing paper were also indicative, such as redress payments to victims of historical institutional abuse. Those figures were accompanied by a very detailed and logical narrative. Sadly, there was no narrative attached to the £28.25 million in the briefing document for the office of identity. That was a serious omission. I ask the officials responsible for that document to reflect on why they did not put in a narrative to make clear that those figures were, to some extent, indicative. I look forward to a debate on that Bill to find out what has happened to, and the implications for, the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition. It has cost nearly £1 million, sat for three and a half years and is yet to produce a single word by way of a report.

These new bodies and commissioners probably move us off the grounds of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. I note that, at point 4 under the chapter "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity", there is a list of eight action points to promote Irish, all under the umbrella of:

"where appropriate and where people so desire it".

I hope that the same test will be applied to the work of the Irish language commissioner, the Ulster-Scots/Ulster-British commissioner and the office of identity and cultural expression.

Ms Armstrong: Like others, I reiterate that it is great to be back in this place talking about legislation. I appreciate that, as the First Minister said, this is not the full amount of legislation that will be taken through. We are very realistic that this is a one-year programme and that the legislation will be brought through by the summer in order for it to happen in the coming year. However, a number of things are missing from this, which is sad to see. We could have had quick wins: for instance, the removal of mineral planning permissions and bits and pieces on driver and bus licensing that the Infrastructure Minister could have taken through. We look forward to seeing what the future plan will be.

Getting back to what is listed, I have a question on welfare mitigation. I think that all of us have this in the back of our mind: where is that legislative paper? We all welcome the mitigations and need those to come forward. The

31 March deadline is pending, yet none of us has seen the paperwork. That was brought up as a concern in the Communities Committee. We appreciate that the Minister is working extremely hard to try to take that forward and that it will be by accelerated passage. That is not the way that we want it to happen, but it is the only way to, hopefully, meet the deadline. However, we have not yet seen the paperwork. My question to the First Minister, therefore, is this: will the legislation be processed in time? If not, I have a great concern that the Civil Service will not be able to cover any gaps. What will we do then?

4.30 pm

Thinking about that sector size criteria, my colleague from Strangford Mike Nesbitt MLA has confirmed that we do have an issue about housing and that is why it is vital that the housing (amendment) Bill comes forward. The reclassification of social housing is very much needed to ensure that co-ownership stays as an option for people and can actually receive funding to enable people to use that to buy a house, but if the reclassification of housing is going to take some time, we are in trouble. The Minister has confirmed that her legislation may well come through before the summer, but it will be about how long it will take ONS after that. That will cause difficulties for us.

On the licensing and registration of clubs, I reiterate what others have said: microbreweries deserve to be treated appropriately. They can provide a tourism opportunity in areas, particularly rural areas, where there are none and can potentially bring jobs into those rural areas. I look forward to that coming forward.

We absolutely welcome the domestic abuse Bill. We take this forward knowing that, finally, we will have legislation that will protect victims and provide a good way for the police to look after people.

We appreciate that this year's Budget Bill will be for one year. We need to see the Programme for Government for that. Once we have this Budget Bill out of the way, we want Committees to start planning for the three-year period, because while we understand that, in this period of time, we have a Budget Bill and a Programme for Government that are set for a year, there is a commitment to a three-year process or longer and we need to be able to plan for that. I look forward to movements being made by the Executive after the summer to bring forward discussions on the future Programme for Government.

Mr Givan: I, too, welcome the opportunity to contribute to this take-note debate this afternoon. It is not just legislation that marks out the effectiveness of an Assembly; it is Ministers taking decisions, Question Time and being able to raise all these issues. Nevertheless, legislation is important where a need is identified, but it should not be legislation for legislation's sake.

I welcome the statement from the Executive Office, within weeks of it having been formed, that outlined a number of key pieces of legislation that can be taken forward. I have no doubt that there will be more Bills. As the Member from Strangford said, other work is needed, including in the Department of Justice on stalking and on a miscellaneous provisions Bill that can cover areas such as, for example, the Gillen review and a whole host of issues around sentencing that I want to see taken forward. The Minister of Justice indicated that such a Bill will be brought forward.

However, it is not cited in this, as that will be the case for others. I welcome the debate this afternoon.

In respect of the Department of Justice, I want to comment on the domestic abuse Bill and the criminal justice Bill to reform the committal process. Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom not to have a domestic abuse offence that specifically covers controlling or coercive behaviour or behaviour that amounts to emotional or psychological abuse. Preparations for such legislation were at an advanced stage in 2017 but, unfortunately, the dissolution of the Assembly prevented that legislation being taken forward. Most recently, the Department was moving to make provision for such an offence through Westminster. The return of this Assembly means that the legislation can be made here, and I have no doubt that the Justice Committee will ensure that key stakeholders, voluntary organisations and, most importantly, the victims of domestic abuse can have a voice in shaping the legislation to meet our specific needs.

The importance of having appropriate and effective legislation is illustrated by the Police Service's own statistics, which show that, in the 12 months from 1 January 2019 to the end of that year, there were 18,033 domestic abuse crimes recorded in Northern Ireland, which is the highest of any 12-month period recorded since 2004-05. The number of crimes increased by nearly 15% on the previous 12 months.

Since the first meeting of the Justice Committee, we have made the case for the legislation to be brought through the Assembly rather than at Westminster, and I fully support the inclusion of this Bill in the Executive's legislative programme. When discussing the legislation with officials from the Department, the Committee was concerned that the estimated timescales for legislation to become operational appeared very lengthy and unambitious. However, following the introduction of the Bill, officials have estimated that Royal Assent will be around April or May 2021, subject to the Bill's passage through the Assembly and associated timetables. With awareness raising and training, the offence would be operational by April or May 2022.

I have no doubt that the Committee for Justice will want to carry out robust, detailed scrutiny of the legislation during Committee Stage, particularly the definition of the proposed offence, to ensure that it is as effective as possible. Progress on that will be a top priority for the Committee. With the will of the Assembly, I am sure that the legislation can be completed in less time than the Department envisages. When the Chief Constable appeared at the Committee recently, he was pressed on the issue, and he reassured us that the PSNI would be able to undertake the training in less time than the 12 months originally indicated by the Department. Last week, at the Committee, the Minister indicated that she hoped to introduce the Bill just before Easter or shortly afterwards. The legislation is needed urgently. The sooner the work can begin on it, the better.

The Committee also discussed the possibility of including an offence to cover stalking because that is connected. However, the Minister indicated that work on that was still not advanced enough and that it would come forward in a separate Bill.

We are also looking at the committal process. That is part of the speeding up of justice. For far too long, we have talked about the slow process of the justice system. This is one element to it that will make progress.

I look forward to dealing with those two Bills in particular through the Committee for Justice, as well as the other aspects of the legislative programme that has been outlined.

Mr Stalford: I do not know whether other Members have referred to it, but, on this day three years ago, we were all standing shivering outside primary schools, asking people for their votes in the Assembly election. It is a source of profound regret that so much of those three years has been wasted. I believe firmly in devolution and the value of having devolved government at Stormont. Devolution allows us to serve the people. Our success in this place shall no longer be determined — and cannot be measured — by simply existing or surviving. These institutions need to be used to deliver for the people.

That is why I welcome the fact that the Executive have outlined the legislative programme. Of course, it is not a comprehensive list but is merely a headline of priorities going forward. I want to mention some of the issues that are of particular concern in my constituency. I am very pleased to welcome the housing (amendment) Bill. It is essential for constituencies, particularly South Belfast. I am sure that all Belfast Members can attest to the need to build more social and affordable housing. I welcome that because I think that it will be positive.

I also welcome the clarification on the culture package, which was given in the earlier part of the debate by the deputy First Minister. It is important for Northern Ireland society that all cultures and identities are treated with equality, dignity and respect. I come from a British unionist tradition. I have been a member of the Orange Institution from the age of 17. My father was in it. His father was in it. Going back a long way, I am steeped in that tradition. I am proud to come from that tradition. I recognise that other people are steeped in, and proud to come from, other traditions. The success of Northern Ireland, going forward, will be when we create a situation where people feel equally valued and respected in their identity. Therefore, the clarification that was given by the deputy First Minister is important — that we will take that package forward together, with no tradition or identity being left behind.

I very much welcome the proposals that were referred to by Mr Givan on the introduction of a domestic abuse Bill. It is a scandal that this is the only part of the United Kingdom that does not have dedicated legislation in that area. It is right that the Executive have identified that gap and the need to fill it. I look forward to that legislation coming forward and to seeing the discussions and debates taking place in the House. That is where those debates and discussions should have been taking place for the last three years. There is no point in rehearsing the arguments as to how the last three years were frittered away; let all of us across the House now resolve to use the two years that we have remaining and demonstrate to all the people of Northern Ireland the value of having devolved government here at Stormont.

Dr Archibald: I, too, welcome the publication of the legislative programme and the opportunity to contribute to the debate here today. I will, first, speak briefly in my

capacity as Chair of the Economy Committee. For the past number of weeks, the Committee has been engaged in what you could call a process of familiarisation with the remit of the Department. We have heard from the various sections of the Department on the programme of work. We have also engaged with the Minister on her priorities. It will be no surprise, however, for Members to hear that a large part of the Committee's work over the next number of months will be focused on Brexit and the impact that it will have across the remit of the Department. We have been advised that there will be a legislative burden associated with leaving the EU, and we anticipate turning our attention to the scrutiny of that.

As I mentioned, we have engaged with the Minister, who has stated publicly that she intends to legislate for statutory parental bereavement leave. We do not yet have a time frame for that, but the Committee is very supportive and welcoming of that, as, I am sure, most Members are generally. The Committee is still developing its priorities, and it will continue with that work over the next number of weeks and months. Potential legislation will form part of that discussion.

I will speak now as a Sinn Féin spokesperson. Some significant and important Bills are contained in the legislative programme that has been published. Members have already talked about them. Some are very necessary and welcome, such as the Bill in relation to bedroom tax, the housing amendment Bill, and, of course, the domestic abuse Bill. We all welcome and look forward to those coming before the Assembly. I also welcome the legislation to implement the commitments in New Decade, New Approach, particularly in relation to the repeal of the Administration of Justice (Language) Act 1737, the appointment of an Irish language commissioner and the provision of official recognition of the status of the Irish language. Will the First Minister, in her response, indicate the time frame for bringing that legislation to the Assembly?

Finally, it is welcome that the deputy First Minister, in her comments when introducing the debate, indicated that this is the legislative programme as it currently stands and that other legislation for which there is no time frame as yet has not been included. I look forward to a number of other pieces of legislation, particularly in relation to some of the commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, being expedited, not least in terms of my own remit on climate action and workers' rights. I look forward to those pieces of legislation being added to the programme.

Mr Durkan: As our party's social justice spokesperson and as a member of the Communities Committee, my focus will be on the pieces of legislation coming forward pertaining to that. The breadth and importance of the role of the Department for Communities is reflected in part by the fact that the Minister has at least four named pieces of legislation to progress in the near future, all of which have the potential to improve people's lives. As a member of that Committee, I look forward to working with the Minister and others to do just that.

Ms Bradley, the Chair of the Committee, has already outlined in some detail the need for and purpose of those pieces of legislation. The welfare mitigation social sector size criteria Bill will give security of tenure and peace of mind to tens of thousands of households across the North.

We in the SDLP argued that the best way to protect people from the bedroom tax and other draconian elements of welfare reform was not to legislate for them in the first place. That is why we voted against it, but we are where we are, and it is vital that we take all steps possible to prevent people from being plunged into debt, arrears and, ultimately, homelessness.

4.45 pm

It is our view, and not only our view, that the cost of not mitigating the bedroom tax would far outweigh the cost of mitigation payments. Minister Hargey has assured us that existing loopholes that have seen over 250 households not qualifying for the existing mitigation payments will be closed. That is good news, but what about those who have fallen through the gaps? Will they be awarded retrospective entitlement to mitigation payments? What about the massive arrears that many of those so affected have accrued? Those questions and many others will need to be answered as the legislation progresses, and while I recognise that different legislative tools can be utilised to extend other mitigation measures, I wonder whether either Minister from the Executive Office could advise whether new legislation will be required to mitigate the awful two-child rule, which was introduced here only after the original mitigation package had been designed and welfare powers had been handed back to the Tories. We must not be content with merely extending existing mitigation; we must listen to and learn from those who are bearing the brunt of welfare cuts and other experts in that field.

The housing (amendment) Bill is essential to ensure that more much-needed social and affordable homes can be built. We would also like the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to be empowered to get back to doing what nobody has done better since: building houses and providing homes.

The pension schemes Bill is also important legislation — it will not get the same headlines as the others — but I wonder whether there is any intention — perhaps one of the Ministers can clarify — to bring forward new legislation or amend existing legislation to reduce the pension age in the North.

I declare a pretty tenuous interest in the liquor licensing legislation. It is ridiculous that here, in 2020, we are still stuck with antiquated licensing laws that will, once again this Easter, hamper our hospitality industry from maximising the benefit of a holiday period. The legislation is not just about addressing that; it must identify and prevent practices that could and do contribute to alcohol misuse and its associated issues.

There is other stuff that we would like to see in there. We welcome the fact that the New Decade, New Approach deal included childcare as an Executive priority and would like to have seen it matched, or mentioned at least, in the Executive programme. We recognise that the programme is not exhaustive, and we are happy to work in our various Committees with the respective Ministers to see how it can be added to and enhanced.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as an rún seo. I thank the Ministers for tabling the motion on forthcoming legislation to the House.

I have to say — Mark will not be surprised at this — that the SDLP also voted against protecting the most

vulnerable. The party claim to be the champions of the most vulnerable. SDLP Members also voted against cancer drugs, special educational needs and so on and so forth.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, you are grand.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, I have heard enough.

So, I am glad that they are now on board. One thing I do agree with the Member on is that I do not like the term “welfare reform”; it is very American and masks the impact of Tory austerity on people’s lives.

This morning, I noted Michelle O’Neill, joint First Minister, saying that the small window is what it is but that she was hopeful that other legislation would come forward. I was delighted to see the Minister for Communities come straight out and along with the support of her Executive colleagues, and that is the entire Executive, look at protecting those most vulnerable on the mitigations on what has been known as the bedroom tax.

The legislation that is coming forward on the reclassification of housing associations is really important because it means that the money from financial transactions capital, particularly for co-ownership, which we talked about during last week’s Budget Bill debate, will be spent. It will be spent delivering much-needed homes, and it also means that housing associations will remain private so will be able to build with half their own money and half from the Department rather than all the money coming from the block grant. I, too, would like to see the Housing Executive building again in conjunction with housing associations because I do not think that there is enough housing to meet needs, irrespective of any bedroom tax. I think that it is a horrible piece of legislation to hurt those who are most vulnerable.

I am concerned about an element of the proposed pensions Bill, so I would like to see more information about the automatic enrolment of employees. Maybe that will happen in the legislation that comes forward. In particular, I am worried about those who are on zero-hours contracts, and that has not been mentioned in any great detail. With a lot of these entitlements, people on zero-hours contracts do not enjoy the same benefits as the rest of the employees. That will certainly have an impact on them once they reach pension age.

I think that it is particularly good that we are looking at a suite of legislation on language and culture. Like many Members, I listened to Christopher — he is not in the Chamber at the minute — talk about his background. The repeal of the 1737 legislation will be very welcome, particularly for children or anybody who has to go through court, including families dealing with wills and things. I do not think that people fully understood the iniquitous impact that that legislation had, particularly to people’s identity and their ability to express themselves in their first language.

Legislation on liquor licensing will be greatly welcomed, particularly by the hospitality industry. With potentially more hours, I would like to see better protections for workers, particularly those who are on zero-hours contracts. I know that this will not cover all workers, but

it would certainly cover those who are involved in the hospitality industry.

I am not on the Justice Committee, but I am really interested in and quite supportive of the domestic abuse Bill. I agree with the Chair of the Justice Committee, Paul Givan, when he said that he would like to see other legislation coming forward, and I would particularly like to see legislation on upskirting and other offences, which we do not yet have in full. There are a lot of pieces of legislation that I do not foresee taking a lot of time. Kellie Armstrong mentioned the two bits of legislation that we will be dealing with on the Communities Committee that are going forward through accelerated passage. That is not anybody's first option; I think it is a last resort. It was agreed that we would do that, but Paula Bradley, the Committee Chair, said that any future legislation that comes in front of our Committee will certainly be scrutinised, and I welcome that. I also welcome the raft of statutory rules that will come forward. We will be able to scrutinise those and, potentially, private Member's Bills that may amend current legislation. It is a good start, but I think the sentiments are that we are looking forward to seeing more.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Executive legislative programme up to June 2020. The absence of an Executive for over three years has prevented MLAs from delivering the legislative reform necessary to improve the lives of people across our community, and I welcome the implementation of the New Decade, New Approach commitment to publish a legislative programme of reform.

The legislative programme of reform is, of course, not the full list of Bills that will be implemented in this mandate, but it represents an important start. I particularly welcome the decisive action taken by the Justice Minister to bring forward the domestic abuse Bill. That legislation will recognise that not all abuse is physical and will create a new offence of domestic abuse. The new offence will apply when there are two or more occasions of abusive behaviour against a partner, former partner or family member engaging in controlling or coercive behaviour or behaviour that amounts to psychological, emotional or financial abuse, and it can also include behaviour that is physically violent, threatening or intimidating. I also welcome the committal reform Bill proposed by the Justice Minister. It will speed up justice and deal with delay in the criminal justice system in order to deliver better for victims of crime.

I acknowledge proposals to create an office of identity and cultural expression. I recognise the importance of culture and identity to many in our community and, of course, the creative, positive force that cultural expression can be for a community. The Alliance Party, however, believes that there is an opportunity to widen the scope of the office to one of cultural expression, diversity and inclusion, and to ensure that every identity in our society is respected and celebrated.

The Alliance Party also believes that the work of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition should be promptly concluded and published for consideration and implementation by an office of cultural expression, diversity and inclusion.

Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland has a rich linguistic heritage, and I sincerely hope that the commissioners for Irish and Ulster Scots will enhance access to the language, arts and literature of this region in a positive, proportionate

and inclusive manner. I am somewhat unclear about how a duty in relation to Ulster Scots pertains to the Department of Education, and I await further information from the Minister of Education.

It is concerning that, despite the declaration of a climate emergency by the Assembly, the Environment Minister has not prioritised the enactment of a climate change Bill and an independent environment agency Bill. It is disappointing that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have not prioritised a legislative amendment to remove the exemption of teachers from the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order, but I hope that those measures can be introduced in due course. All are legislative measures that would have set out the intention of the Executive Office and the Environment Minister to deliver a more united and sustainable Northern Ireland for all.

There is also, of course, an opportunity for MLAs to introduce private Member's Bills, and the Alliance Party will seek to play a constructive role in that, particularly for integrated education, early education in care and animal welfare. The programme is, however, an important first step towards restoring the legislative function of the Assembly, and I look forward to playing my part in ensuring that it is a legislative programme that delivers better for everyone in our community.

Mr Gildernew: I, too, welcome the publication of the legislative programme today. Although there is no legislation that directly impacts on health, some measures that are being introduced will have a significant impact on the physical and mental health outcomes of many vulnerable people. I will draw particular attention to two of those measures: sector size in housing and the binning of the bedroom tax, as is being introduced by Minister Hargey; and the domestic abuse Bill that is being introduced by the Minister of Justice.

The Committee is working on a series of forward work imperatives, and we will look at those in due course, but I do not think that anyone will be surprised to learn that we expect legislation to come our way that relates to public health and Brexit and as a consequence of ongoing inquiries.

As Sinn Féin health spokesperson, I look forward to working on legislation that comes forward in future programmes. Certain measures would be very useful in addressing health inequalities. One is supporting and encouraging a higher uptake of breastfeeding, which produces better outcomes. That is long overdue. We also want developments on carers' rights to come from the 'Power to People' report that was commissioned by Michelle O'Neill when Minister of Health. We are acutely aware of the need for a single piece of legislation to provide clarity on safeguarding legislation, as well as providing additional protection for older members of our community.

5.00 pm

Mr Allister: Obviously, the output of a legislature is its key function. A Member who spoke some time ago told us that what we had in the document was the headline of priorities. Indeed. We find that, in the primary office of the Executive, that of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the only priority that will make its way towards the statute book is the language package. Whether you call it a trilogy of acts or a trinity of acts, unholy or otherwise,

there is no mistaking the fact that the centrepiece of the legislation is the Irish language legislation, the very thing that, Mrs Foster told us, would not happen on her watch and that was rejected in February 2018. Yet, here it is as the centrepiece of the package. Yes, the package might be wrapped in a few tartan bows and a few items of that nature, but the core and the heart and the fundamental is the Irish language legislation. You have only to compare the two proposed Bills for Ulster-Scots and the Irish language to discover which really matters. The Irish language commissioner, of course, is a commissioner with bite, an enforcer whose main function will be:

“to protect and enhance the ... use of ... Irish ... by public authorities”

in the provision of their services. The poor old Ulster — well, he is not even called the Ulster-Scots commissioner; the “further ... Commissioner” is the grandest title that he gets. The poor old further Commissioner can “produce and distribute publicity material”. Wow. He can:

“increase awareness and visibility of [Ulster-Scots] services which are provided”.

No enhancement; no adding to; just taking the static of what is there and increasing awareness of it. Whereas, the enforcer in the Irish language has all those additional powers. It is clear that it has been packaged in that way to try to deceive some of the gullible that it is not really what it is, but, of course, as we come to debate it, we will have the opportunity, I hope, to further explore and expose those very issues.

I have one outstanding question for the First Minister. I have been tabling questions about this since the Assembly came back, and there seems to be a great diffidence about answering them. I asked this simple question: will there be a public consultation on this trilogy of legislation? I did not get an answer, so I tabled it again, more precisely. I tabled it as a priority question for written answer. It was due to be answered 10 days ago, but it has still not been answered. I ask the First Minister this today: will there be a public consultation on this trilogy or trinity of legislation, or are the public just being taken for granted? Do their views not matter? Will this be steamrollered through because it was the price of getting back into the House and of getting back into the First Minister’s limo? Is that the truth of it? That seems to be it.

Of course, I have already raised the question today of the cost and the squander. It is squander. There is not a person in the House who does not adequately speak English, yet, in another mechanism, we will spend hundreds of thousands probably —

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

Mr Allister: — maybe millions, on interpretation and translation that no one needs.

Mr Carroll: There are things to be welcomed in the legislative programme, but I find it disappointing how the Executive plan to address some important issues. As was mentioned, despite declaring a climate emergency in week one, there is no pledge to legislate for measures to tackle the crisis. On welfare, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone who says that this brutal system designed by the Tories does not require mitigations. Only last week, we heard that universal credit was directly connected to the

rise in clinical depression. Under the current mitigations package, too many people are not being protected. People face a six-week wait for benefits. We have had a surge in the number of food banks and in food poverty, with single mothers feeling the sharpest effects, being punished by the brutal and misogynistic two-child tax cap.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. He quite identifies that welfare “reform”, as it is called, was designed by the Tories. Does he agree with me that, while it was designed by the Tories, it was delivered here by Sinn Féin and the DUP and the attack by the Sinn Féin North Belfast Member on me is merely another attempt to erase their fingerprints from it?

Mr Carroll: I thank the Member for his point. I agree with him: it was voted for by those parties.

Those on the personal independence payment (PIP) face traumatic application processes carried out by private companies that have been the subject of incredible allegations, such as ignoring medical evidence. Many are denied PIP by those same companies, only for them to win appeals because it is found that they do need the support. The average waiting time for an appeal is an incredible 33 and a half weeks and much longer for the 7,000 people who have had their appeal adjourned.

Some already pay the disgraceful bedroom tax, despite claims from some Sinn Féin Members that People Before Profit and I were not telling the truth when we warned of that inevitability. Those who move to houses that better accommodate their disability, illness or children will be hit with the bedroom tax if that new home has more bedrooms than they require.

That is our reality, because the Assembly did the Tories’ dirty work. At the time, the big parties told us that they had no choice but to implement welfare reform, because, otherwise, Westminster would fine us. At the time, People Before Profit refused to accept that excuse. Five years on, we are backed by studies that show that we lose at least £1 billion from our economy every year because of welfare reform. The amount that we pay in mitigations and from outsourcing PIP assessments, added to the amount that people have lost from their pocket, is much more than we would have paid in fines to Westminster. While we pay more, people in every community and constituency suffer. Today, I reiterate our call to scrap the reforms and implement a social security system that aims to protect the most vulnerable in our communities, not only to save money but to save lives.

I move on to the proposed housing Bill. We have a huge waiting list emergency, with certain communities particularly affected, yet our Housing Executive barely functions. To rectify the situation, the Executive should allow the Housing Executive to borrow against itself and promote a rapid programme of building public housing; instead, we see plans to allow housing associations to do exactly that. While housing associations can and should work in harmony with the Housing Executive, the privatisation of those organisations removes accountability, as it strips away necessary oversight and answerability. Housing associations should not be the main vehicle for providing homes, but, if they are allowed to borrow and build while the Housing Executive cannot, that may indeed become the case, especially as the Minister for Communities cannot rule out the selling off of Housing Executive houses beyond this year.

There are some welcome moves on the Irish language that are evidently the result of the hard work of Irish language activists but fall disappointingly short of the commitments given in the St Andrews Agreement. Gaeilgeoirí were promised no return to Stormont without the Irish language Act that they needed, and that has not happened. The plans do not give the language official status, which is a key demand in order to protect it from the whims of individual Ministers, such as the cut to Líofoa funding. Whilst I welcome the appointment of an Irish language commissioner, I am concerned that his or her work could be vetoed by the deputy First Minister or the First Minister and that suggestions for best practice are required only to be given due regard by Ministers. Ministers in the business of making decisions such as cutting the Líofoa funding will lose little sleep over the commissioner, especially when the post is announced without any mention of funding, signage or rights.

Finally, when it comes to language rights, we should question the unnecessary equivalence that the Executive continue to demand when the Irish language is mentioned. Despite a much-hailed “New approach”, the constant equivalence only further entrenches sectarianism by doubling down on the two-traditions approach, whereby communalism is elevated in politics while other approaches, such as working-class history, labour history, women’s history and more, can be relegated.

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): I thank Members for most of their contributions to today’s debate. It should not surprise us that, as a primary function of the Assembly, legislation is a subject of considerable and enduring interest to its Members. Legislation is, of course, a shared responsibility between the Executive and the Assembly. While Ministers identify the need and develop the underlying policy, it is for the Assembly, ultimately, to decide, after debate and scrutiny, whether to legislate to give effect to the policy.

Our purpose in presenting the legislative programme has therefore been to advise the Assembly on the matters that, the Executive believe, are sufficiently important to be enacted as law. As those Bills are introduced, the Assembly will shortly have its opportunity to consider those matters in greater detail than today’s debate allows us, as this is only a take-note debate. I am sure Members will have many and various questions that they will want to go through about each Bill that will come before the House.

I will go to each of the various issues that were raised in the debate. Paula Bradley and Declan McAleer spoke as Chairpersons of their respective Committees and welcomed the Bills relating to their Departments.

The TEO Committee Chair, Colin McGrath, wanted some clarity about when the NDNA commitments would be brought forward by the Executive Office. Our officials are processing and progressing the New Decade, New Approach agreement and draft Bills. Consideration has been given to bringing forward the language rights and identity proposals in the agreement as soon as possible. The New Decade, New Approach agreement sets a very challenging time frame, as it does for many issues, and it sets the time frame for the introduction of the draft Bills to the Assembly as:

“within 3 months of the restoration of the institutions”.

Therefore, people who feign surprise that the Bills should be in the legislative programme obviously have not read the New Decade, New Approach agreement, where there is a commitment to bringing forward those Bills within three months. The agreement commits me and the Deputy First Minister to sponsoring and overseeing a new framework that will recognise and celebrate Northern Ireland’s diversity of identities and culture and will accommodate cultural difference. I hope that that answers the Chair’s point about timing.

Mr Nesbitt welcomed a number of Bills. He asked whether welfare mitigation would be temporary or permanent, and that is, of course, a matter for the Minister. He looked forward to multi-year Budgets in the future and hoped that they would be before us.

Kellie Armstrong welcomed what was there and made some commentary about things that she wished were there but were not. Again, she hoped that Budget Bills in the near future would be for multi-year Budgets — as do we all.

Paul Givan made the point that it is not always about legislation and we should not just have legislation for the sake of it; it must be there to make a difference and to answer a real need. He hoped that the Department of Justice would be able to bring forward the stalking Bill, and I think that we all agree that we look forward to that legislation. He welcomed the domestic abuse Bill and give us clear reasons and some statistics as to why it is urgent that we deal with that legislation.

Christopher Stalford referred to this date three years ago and what we were all doing. He indicated that devolution allows us to serve our different electorates and that it is important that we are here to do so. He welcomed the housing amendment Bill and welcomed the DFM’s clarification about the written statement on culture and rights. He indicated that the success of Northern Ireland is really when we create a situation where everyone is equally valued and respected. He felt that the package should go forward together, as no one’s identity should be left behind.

5.15 pm

Ms Archibald, Chair of the Economy Committee, made reference to the significance of a number of the Bills, including the housing Bill and the domestic abuse Bill, and again welcomed the fact that we are bringing forward the package on our NDNA commitments, including the repeal of the 1737 Act. She also made reference to the time frame, but I hope I have answered that query.

Mr Durkan asked a question about the raising of the pension age. That, of course, is a matter for the Westminster Government and not for us.

Ms Ní Chuilín welcomed the reclassification of housing associations, the mitigations on the bedroom tax and the suite of legislation on language and culture. She also welcomed the liquor licensing legislation.

Mr Lyttle recognised that this is not the full list. It is important that we recognise that this is not the full legislative programme; it is as much as we think we can bring forward within this mandate. He welcomed the domestic abuse legislation and the committal reform Bill. He made comments on the office of identity and culture

and said that he hoped that it would be inclusive of diversity and inclusion. If he looks at the strategic aims of the office in 'New Decade, New Approach', he will see that it is clear that one of them is:

"to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, including Northern Ireland's ethnic, national, linguistic and faith communities".

Those aims are covered there and will be reflected in the legislation when it comes forward. He was disappointed about a number of things that are not included, but I think he accepted that it was a start.

Mr Gildernew, Chair of the Health Committee, mentioned items that he would like to see coming forward from the Department of Health, including legislation on adult safeguarding, on carers and on breastfeeding, but he recognised the impact that some of the mitigations would have in relation to the health of the people.

Mr Allister made various comments around the priority of the TEO. As I indicated, we are just following through on the commitments that we made in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. He also made comments on perceived differences between the office for the Irish language commissioner and the office for the Ulster-British commissioner. Both commissioners will investigate complaints where a public authority has failed to have due regard to standards. That is both commissioners, not one. He should not mislead the House in that way.

Mr Speaker, I have to ask, is the Member seriously suggesting that the people of Northern Ireland did not want to see the Northern Ireland Assembly back and running? Is the only reason we are back here the fact that, apparently, I have acquired a limousine? Seriously, at a time when we are dealing with our response to leaving the European Union and with our response to coronavirus and all of the issues around that, I have to say this to the Member: the Assembly and Executive have a big job of work to do. Whilst of course he has the right to criticise and question, I cannot let it go past for him to say that that is the only reason we are back in the Assembly. Some of us do this job because we feel we have a public service to deliver to people, and we do it because we have a duty to the people who elected us. That is why we are standing here today and doing our job.

Mr Carroll made various comments in relation to the Irish language. He does not like the fact that there is an Ulster-British commissioner, but that is what the agreement says, and that is what will be delivered.

As the deputy First Minister outlined in her opening speech, the publication of the legislative programme is only the beginning of a process which will, over the next two years, involve Ministers, the Executive, the Assembly and its Committees working closely and collaboratively to deliver the legislation. That, of course, is not an end in itself. What is most important is the positive difference that it will make to the lives of our citizens. We fully expect this programme to grow as the work of the Departments regains momentum, and we will keep the Assembly updated on that, but we must also be conscious of the limited time frame within which we are working.

We believe, therefore, that our approach to legislation should be governed by a number of important considerations as we move forward. First, will it make a

positive difference to people's lives by offering protection or remedying weakness in provision?

Secondly, is it essential to be done now? Would it displace other more critical legislation? Thirdly, is it achievable? Is it based on sound policy and implementation plans? Lastly, can it be scheduled to be completed within the time available in order to avoid nugatory effort at the end of the mandate, bringing about congestion, which has, unfortunately, been a feature of past mandates?

Taking those considerations into account and with a mutual recognition of the importance of legislation, we believe that there is great potential for the Executive and the Assembly to work together to maximise the value that we can obtain from the next two years and to lay a firm foundation for legislation in the next full mandate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the Executive's legislative programme as presented by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in their statement of 11 February 2020.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a moment.

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

Private Members' Business

Violent Crime

Mrs D Kelly: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern about increasing levels of violent crime; recognises that this has been accompanied by a similar rise in alcohol and drug-related offences; notes the effect of such crime on victims and on communities across Northern Ireland; further notes that comprehensive legislation protecting victims of domestic violence has yet to be passed; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work collaboratively with the Minister of Health to bring forward an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshallled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and a further 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech.

I invite Dolores Kelly to open the debate on the motion.

Mrs D Kelly: I am pleased to have the opportunity, on behalf of the SDLP, to present this motion to the House. What should be clear is that the causes of violent crime are complex, and there is no single, simple solution. The motion and the Sinn Féin amendment, which we accept, acknowledge that fact. I am pleased that the Minister of Justice is in attendance for the debate, but I acknowledge that not all the solutions lie with her Department. Tackling violent crime will require an approach that spans right across government.

Statistics show that violent crime is increasing. In the 12 months from 1 January to 31 December 2019, 106,604 crimes were recorded in Northern Ireland. That is an increase of 7,300 on the previous 12 months, continuing the increase seen during 2018-19. Violence against the person increased by 14.1%. That equates to 4,975 offences. The biggest rise was in the category "violence without injury", which should be seen in light of changes in recording practice with the harassment classification. Progress is being made on the reporting of hate crime, and I look forward to the outcome of Judge Desmond Marrinan's review. Hate crime is, of course, a motivating factor in many crimes against the person.

Tragically, last year there were 26 homicides, whilst a further 167 people died or were seriously injured as a direct consequence of unlawful driving. Behind those statistics are hundreds of personal tragedies — the lives lost, families left bereaved and many others having to struggle with life-changing injuries. Our thoughts are with them today.

Police statistics also tell us that there were 983 reported rapes and 2,434 other sexual offences. Crimes against society are also increasing, with 951 drug trafficking offences and 6,957 drug possession offences. Minister, I welcome your commitment and that of your predecessor,

Ms Claire Sugden, to put in place stronger legislation to tackle domestic and sexual violence. Across Northern Ireland, eight of the 11 policing districts showed an increase in domestic abuse incidents and all 11 had higher levels of domestic abuse crimes. We can all acknowledge that both those types of crime are vastly under-reported and that much more needs to be done.

The comprehensive report by Judge Gillen sets out some 253 recommendations across the criminal justice system, many of which will require additional financial resources if we are serious about supporting victims and bringing perpetrators before the courts. Many others challenge government to work more collaboratively and smarter. Therefore, Minister, I am sure that we will all be keen to hear your response, the steps taken to date and your implementation plan to address those recommendations.

I also welcome the high priority that the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board have given to tackling domestic and sexual violence in the draft policing plan for the year ahead. I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. The establishment of a domestic homicide review team will also, hopefully, help agencies to better understand and red-flag vulnerable individuals to allow for earlier intervention and prevention.

The changing drugs market is identified as one of the drivers of the increase in violent crime. The role of alcohol-fuelled violence is also well-documented. Substance misuse is properly reflected in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, and I welcome the focus of the Health Minister, Robin Swann, on developing a strategy to improve services and take innovative and effective action to reduce alcohol and drug-related harm. The recent focus on low-level drug dealing and tackling the availability of illegal prescription drugs online must continue to be a priority for the PSNI. Community confidence in policing will be judged on how well the police respond to the low level but high impact of that type of behaviour on the community, but law enforcement is not the only solution.

There is little that I can disagree with in the DUP amendment, but it practically rewrites the motion and focuses almost exclusively on a criminal justice response. Therefore, I cannot accept that amendment.

Early intervention supporting families, such as the Sure Start programme, must continue to be funded by the Minister for Communities. More investment is needed to provide secure homes for those and their children who flee violence. I trust, Minister, that this is an issue you pick up on with your ministerial colleague Ms Hargey.

No debate on the prevalence of violent crime would be complete without attempting to outline the causal factors behind and the absolute requirement to have, as our motion calls for:

"a resourced implementation plan to reduce ... offending"

and reoffending. The Older People's Commissioner accepts that older people are less likely to be victims of crime, but whilst not diminishing the trauma that is experienced by older victims of crime, that subject will be debated more fully tomorrow, and I will concentrate more on younger people.

According to the World Health Organization, being male is the greatest risk factor, with 15- to 29-year-old men accounting for three quarters of all homicide victims globally. Being male not only increases the likelihood of being a victim of violence but increases their likelihood of being a perpetrator of violent acts. Our prison population profile underlines that fact.

There is a wealth of academic research pinpointing the key risk factors and individuals most at risk of being either victims or perpetrators. That includes growing inequalities between the haves and the have-nots, hopeless job prospects for many of our young people, the collapse of Youth Service provision through funding cuts, the crisis in mental health care, school failure and expulsion, and outcomes for looked-after children.

We need to break the cycle of violence. Any approach will depend on partnerships across a number of sectors such as education, health, social services, housing, youth services, probation and victim services. In particular, it needs communities working together to support measures aimed at getting young people and young adults involved in positive activities.

5.30 pm

I welcome the reintroduction of neighbourhood policing teams across all council DEAs and hope that the recent PSNI recruitment campaign will enable the Chief Constable to quickly fill the gaps in provision. However, I must remind the Minister that the additional 400 officers are funded through additional money secured for Brexit planning. They will need additional financial commitment from her Department beyond the next two years.

As chair of the partnership committee, I was pleased that our recent work enabled the focus to return to policing neighbourhood teams across all areas. That was a key priority for the then Assistant Chief Constable, now Deputy Chief Constable Mark Hamilton, in his delivery on local policing. I am sure that we can all relate to the fact that neighbourhood policing teams are the eyes and ears of the police. They can enable earlier interventions and identify those most likely to be engaged in crime and antisocial behaviour.

We propose a collaborative approach across a number of Departments as the only way forward, and we recognise the key roles that the Justice Minister and Health Minister have in driving forward societal change and saving lives.

I commend the motion and amendment No 2 to the House.

Mr Givan: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "crime;" and insert:

"highlights that in 2018-19 violence against the person accounted for more than one third of all recorded crime in Northern Ireland; notes with concern the assessment by the Police Service of Northern Ireland that crime against women and children is increasing and the resulting harm becoming more severe; further notes the effect of such crime on victims and on communities across Northern Ireland; regrets that comprehensive legislation protecting victims of domestic violence has yet to be passed; notes that the public consultation on the sentencing review Northern Ireland, which sought views specifically on sentencing in respect of deaths by dangerous driving, attacks on elderly people and attacks

on blue-light services, closed on 3 February 2020; and calls on the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation for tougher sentencing for violent crimes and to work collaboratively with the Minister of Health and victims' advocates to introduce an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I invite the Member to take his seat. I just want to confirm that you have 10 minutes to move the amendment and a further five minutes to make a winding-up speech. You may now open the debate.

Mr Givan: This amendment seeks to enhance the motion. I disagree with the characterisation of it by Mrs Kelly. It does not take away from the original motion; it adds to it. It removes nothing from the original motion, but it does enhance it. On that basis, I hope that it will gain support. I have no difficulty with the subsequent amendment that was put forward by Linda Dillon and, if it came to it, I would be happy to support that.

I thank Members for raising an important issue that seriously affects Northern Ireland. It has an impact on the victims who suffer the violence perpetrated against them, and that manifests itself in many forms. It also has a wider impact on a victim's family, friends and community. When a violent incident takes place, there is a broad ripple effect, so it is right that we seek to have a criminal justice system and wider response from society that seek to address that.

I wish that we were able to say that we were winning the battle, but the figures indicate an increasing number of offences. From 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2020, violence against the person was up by 14.3%. The total number of offences relating to violence against the person was almost 41,000, of which nearly 3,500 were sexual offences.

Many more crimes are committed than there are successful prosecutions and sentencing. Looking at it purely through the lens of sentences would be to mask the problem of violent crime. Within that, it is concerning that a third of all violence against the person was domestically motivated. There have been horrendous examples of domestic violence leading to murder. I can think of a most horrific case of violence that led to deaths in Newry recently. Members will be able to bring other examples to the debate. The Assembly will now rightly look at domestic violence, particularly the coercive control aspect. I have no doubt that, as we take the domestic abuse Bill through the House, Members from across the Chamber will have a particular interest in ensuring that we have the most effective legislation in this area given the level of crime. The number of recorded domestic abuse crimes from 1 January 2019 until the end of last year was just over 18,000, which is the highest for any 12-month recording period since 2004-05. That is a horrific statistic. As Members have said, behind each of those figures are individuals and families who are impacted on. This type of crime is appalling, and it is getting worse as opposed to reducing.

We look at the number of fatalities caused by reckless driving, but there are also those who are left with severe, life-changing injuries. I have been dealing with a constituent, a lovely girl, who was out in the car with her boyfriend. He was driving recklessly and was subsequently convicted for that. She was left paralysed, which has had

a life-changing impact on her and her family. There was then huge disappointment at the sentence that was passed down in the courts. The inadequacy of the sentence continues to inflict trauma on that individual and her family. For many people, the sentence does not fit the crime that is perpetrated against them. It is sentencing not just for driving offences but for all these crimes. That is why it was welcome that the former Minister, Claire Sugden, who is here, initiated a sentencing review that covers a broad range of issues. Consultation on that concluded in February. I look forward to seeing the outworkings of some of those proposals. I recognise that there needs to be judicial discretion when it comes to sentencing. There needs to be a framework that takes into account various factors, such as the aggravating factors and the mitigating circumstances. It is right that there is a broad framework by which the judiciary can look at each case. I do not particularly advocate Parliaments specifying the exact form of sentencing that ought to occur when a crime takes place, but I understand why Members often want to bring proposals for minimum sentencing, particularly for attacks on our elderly and in other spheres. As we see the outworkings of the consultation on the sentencing review, which is now complete, I would like more detail on that. I look forward to hearing from the Minister on that consultation process.

Some of the causation factors of the increasing offences include drug abuse and alcohol misuse. Alcohol undoubtedly has a huge influence in offending. Since 2012-13, around half of all violence-with-injury offences and one third of violence-without-injury offences were motivated by alcohol. You often hear alcohol being glamorised. People do not talk about celebrating their big wins by having the odd one or two glasses; people boast about getting drunk. We need to be very careful about the message that we send out about alcohol consumption. That is not to say that we ban alcohol, but it is important that we recognise how many of the people in our accident and emergency departments are there as a result of alcohol misuse. When we look at crimes committed as a result of alcohol misuse, we see that this is a serious problem for this society. Legislation cannot necessarily address it, but we need to take a different approach to alcohol abuse and the way in which all that is managed.

Mr Catney: Thanks very much for giving way, Mr Givan. I hope that you will agree with me that, in the controlled atmosphere of a public house, publicans may still sell drink but that the day of the drunk man in the bar finished 20 years ago. You just do not see them any more. Most of the abuse is fuelled by cheap off-sales and people drinking at home. It is not coming from the controlled environment that is catered for within the structure of a public house.

Mr Givan: The Member makes a very important contribution, and he is right. It is as a result of that preparation for going out on the town, so to speak, with people preloading. When they have already consumed significant amounts of alcohol, they then go to the public house. The publican will often take a very responsible approach to managing the situation, so the Member raises an important point. The reason why I support minimum pricing is because it should not be as cheap as it is to purchase alcohol from off-licences, supermarkets and so on. There needs to be much more robust legislation on minimum pricing, and I look forward to it being introduced.

I thank the Members who tabled the motion. This is a very important debate. I agree that an action plan is needed that addresses a lot of the factors that are talked about, including those in the amendment tabled by Linda Dillon and others opposite, but there can be no excuse for crime emanating from anywhere, whether that be middle-class areas or socially deprived areas. Some of the biggest criminal hotspots are in very affluent parts of the Province, where certain people reside. It is important that we look in detail at the issues. I support taking a cross-departmental approach to an action plan to address the underlying issues, and I look forward to working with the Minister of Justice on specific legislation that can help address the issues that have been raised in the motion. I commend amendment No 1 to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Pat Sheehan to move amendment No 2.

Mr Sheehan: I do not doubt that everyone in the Chamber today —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. I am asking you to move amendment No 2.

Mr Sheehan: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "collaboratively" and insert:

"with Executive Ministers to bring forward an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending, including by addressing the root causes of offending behaviour such as addiction, mental illness, and poverty."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Thank you. I ask the Assembly to note that amendment Nos 1 and 2 are mutually exclusive. Therefore, if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2.

I confirm that you have 10 minutes in which to move the amendment and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Sheehan: I will start again. I do not doubt that everyone in here, from whatever background or party, would like to see a decrease in all crime, particularly violent crime, and a reduction in reoffending. That having been said, there will be disagreement among us about how that can be achieved.

I welcome the Minister of Justice to the debate today. I agree totally with what Dolores Kelly said in her contribution: the Justice Minister cannot solve the issue of crime or violent crime. In fact, she, the police and the whole criminal justice system cannot deal with that issue. Collaboration among all Departments is needed.

There are three principal ways of making inroads into preventing crime and reoffending: the use of legislation; early intervention; and rehabilitation. I will deal first with legislation. It is clear from the evidence that legislation can and does have an impact on behaviours. If you want an example of that, you need just to look to the laws on the wearing of seat belts and on smoking in public places. Of course, one of the most eagerly awaited pieces of legislation will come before the Assembly shortly in the form of the domestic abuse Bill, and I welcome the advent of that Bill. At this stage, I should pay tribute to the previous Justice Minister, Claire Sugden, who did much of

the heavy lifting on the issue but, unfortunately, did not get enough time to see it through to its conclusion.

However, legislation, on its own, is not a panacea for domestic violence. There needs to be better education and greater cultural change, among the male population in particular, before we will make inroads on that scourge of society.

5.45 pm

Early intervention is vital if we are serious about tackling the root causes of crime. When I was a member of the Policing Board, one of the most memorable and powerful presentations that we received was from an officer from Police Scotland. He opened the presentation with a short piece of CCTV footage. It was quite grainy, as CCTV footage often is. It showed a fight on a Glasgow street, with maybe 10 or 12 people involved in it. A taxi pulled up and someone disembarked from it — someone who had absolutely nothing to do with the row that was taking place. One of those who were involved in the row went over and, in the CCTV footage, appeared to punch that person in the side. As it turned out, he had not punched him; he had stabbed him. That man died. The person who was responsible was identified and later sentenced to life imprisonment for murder.

The presentation was about tracing back the life of the perpetrator, the person who had murdered an innocent man in the street. He was someone who had frequently come to the attention of the police, and was often before the courts, sometimes on charges that related to violence. He had left school without any educational qualifications. He came from a dysfunctional family. His parents were addicts of either drugs or alcohol, and he had been in and out of care as a young child.

The police officer was leaving the Policing Board in Belfast to fly to London, to attend a conference on breastfeeding, to give exactly the same presentation. Why was he doing that? He was doing that because the evidence shows that children who are breastfed are more likely to develop a strong bond and relationship with their mothers. It is also beneficial to mothers in building relationships with their children.

I am sure that most Members are now familiar with the term “adverse childhood experiences” (ACE). The evidence shows that children who have suffered a number of adverse childhood experiences are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. We need to deal with those issues. It is not just for the Justice Minister to deal with them. Take, for example, the particular case that I just outlined and the different agencies and statutory bodies that could have intervened at different stages, early in that person’s life. Perhaps there would have been a different outcome; perhaps there would not have been a man lying bleeding to death on the streets of Glasgow.

Just imagine the situation here of a family living in poverty — living in a cold, damp, mouldy house; the children suffering from respiratory illnesses, such as bronchitis or asthma, and that illness being exacerbated by the conditions in which they live. As a result, the children become ill more frequently. That leads to longer absences from school. They continue to fall behind in school and do not catch up. What happens then? Again, the evidence shows that children who leave school without qualifications

are not only likely to end up with chronic illnesses but are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system.

If we are going to talk about collaboration, we must recognise that it is across many spectrums. We have to deal with poverty. Education has to be beefed up. The criminal justice system has a role. The Housing Executive has a role. Collaboration is the name of the game.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: Certainly.

Mr Storey: I have listened with interest to what the Member has said. Sometimes, in these debates, we focus on context. Let us remember that violent crime is carried out by some people from affluent parts of society, and they have access to money and to other individuals. So while I concur with many of the comments that the Member has made, he cannot just say that, if we solved socio-economic issues, we would eradicate crime from our society.

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Member for that intervention. I agree wholeheartedly; we are never going to eradicate crime completely from society. We need to get everyone on an equal footing and give everybody the best start in life that we can. Children should not be punished because they grew up in poverty or had parents who had bad or no parenting skills or because those parents were addicted to drugs or alcohol. We need to do what is best for the greatest number of people in society.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: Yes.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Member acknowledge the fact that any mapping exercise of the prison population will show up disparities, in that most of the people who are serving jail sentences come from high levels of deprivation and poverty? The link between crime and poverty and deprivation is well established.

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Member for that. Her point is well made. The evidence is clear: the prisons are full of, mainly, people from disadvantaged areas. Large percentages of the prison population are involved in self-harming or substance abuse and have suicidal tendencies or mental health problems. We need to deal with all those issues that lead to people going to prison.

I am glad to welcome the pilots that are, and will be, taking place on problem-solving courts, which deal with addiction and mental health. The aim is to do exactly what it says on the tin: to solve the problems that bring people before the courts. It means that people with mental health or addiction issues or who persistently reoffend can get help with those issues, rather than constantly going into and coming back out of prison, like a revolving door.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Sheehan: I come to the last point: when Ronnie Armour, the director of prisons, was in front of the Committee recently, he spoke about his emphasis now being on rehabilitation in the prisons. That is something we need to place emphasis on as well.

Mr Beattie: I support the SDLP motion. We will support both amendments as well, because both add value to the motion. Anything that adds value to the motion is a good

thing. I think that we are all agreed that what we are trying to do is set something in motion to help to deal with the problem of violent crime.

I reflect on the debate and all of the things that we are trying to look at: victims; punishment; rehabilitation; protection; separated communities; social isolation; vulnerability; alcohol and drug abuse; mental health; sentencing; public confidence; accountability; and victims. Victims: sometimes, with everything that we do, we forget about the victims. Yes, we want to stop having victims, but we will have victims, and we need to think about them. I will address that in a little while. I think that everybody is agreed that this is an issue for all Departments; not just Justice, but Health, Communities and Infrastructure. It affects absolutely everybody.

There has been lots of debate about domestic abuse. I listened intently to some of it, including to the Chair of the Justice Committee when he gave horrific statistics on the amount of domestic abuse in the last 12 months. I would add that 27% of children in a violent home have been physically abused. I say that today as pretty horrific news comes out of Larne about a terrible incident. It is something that we have to address. Of course, please do not forget about men; in the statistics for domestic abuse, one in nine victims are men. Men are less likely to come forward and say that they are victims of domestic abuse. In fact, in a recent survey, 20% of people thought that men who were victims of domestic abuse deserved it.

Domestic abuse does not sit alone. Violent crimes against the vulnerable, particularly the elderly, are increasing. As Dolores said, we are discussing that tomorrow, so I will not go into it in any great depth. I reflect back to the causes of violent crime, one of which is mental health. Mental health is a huge issue: if we have a problem with domestic violence being at epidemic levels, the same applies to mental health. We need a comprehensive mental health strategy that victims can feed into.

I am working with the family of Mr and Mrs Cawdery, who were murdered in 2017. The family have been fighting for justice for their relatives. They have had to fight through pretty horrific circumstances and have not had the support that they need. They have been fighting against the Department of Health and the Department of Justice to get help to deal with the seriously flawed serious adverse incident report. That process has cost them their own mental health, and they have not had the necessary support. We are traumatising victims as they fight to get justice, as they fight for support and as they fight to understand why they are victims in the first place.

So, yes, we have to deal with the causes of mental health problems, but when it all goes wrong, we have to deal with the victims. I raised the issue with the Minister of Justice at the Justice Committee, and she gave a very good and fair answer, but I still wonder whether there needs to be a wider debate on whether there should be an overarching victims of crime commissioner. We have a Victims' Commissioner for Troubles crimes. We may well need a victims' commissioner for domestic abuse; I would have no problem with that. What about all the other victims? What about those victims of crime who need somebody to stand up for them and link between the different Departments that we all agree should be working together? There is merit in it, and there needs to be a bigger debate about it.

I spoke to the family and asked, "What would a commissioner have done for you?". "They would have been a voice for the victims. The justice system works only when it delivers justice for both victim and offender, and justice for victims means their voices being heard". It is hard to argue with that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Beattie: I could go on. I guess the point is well made there. We need to look at victims as much as we look at perpetrators. Deal with the perpetrators, but let us not forget about the victims.

Mr Blair: The Alliance Party supports the original motion in the name of Dolores Kelly. We can do that, not least because the motion calls for increased collaborative approaches to crime and the causes of crime. The motion also makes specific reference to victims and communities and the effect of crime on those two groups of people.

The emphasis on collaboration also makes it easy to support the amendment in the name of Linda Dillon and others. That amendment asks the Minister to seek solutions, not simply on a collaborative basis but on an Executive-wide basis.

Alliance is not in a position to support the additional amendment in the name of Mervyn Storey because of its consistent and restrictive reference to criminal justice solutions and its sole focus on such solutions with no reference to prevention, intervention or rehabilitation. In this context, that is not helpful because we have to seek solutions on a wider basis.

In reference to that, there are already some very productive joined-up approaches to the problems that have been highlighted already during the debate. Hopefully, when the Minister speaks, she will elaborate on some of those, such as substance abuse courts, support hubs, which are a growing phenomenon, and multi-agency triage teams, which are helping out in the field.

Those are vital approaches if we are to realistically tackle the drugs and alcohol-related issues that have been spoken about already a number of times.

6.00 pm

There are additional approaches if we wish to seriously nurture a society of lawfulness. For example, there should be visible support from all of us and interaction with police through schools, colleges, public life, universities, employment settings, the family hubs that have been mentioned and wider society. We need to encourage understanding and solutions rather than have judgement on and attach stigma to addiction matters, it could be argued. We need also to have mature discussions on real-life issues such as abuse of prescription drugs on an everyday basis. The collaborative approaches requested in the motion and in the amendment for which I have already expressed Alliance's support are crucial next stages in this process and in seeking understanding as well as solutions. I, therefore, express our support for the motion and the amendment that I outlined.

Mr Frew: I acknowledge the good work by private Members in bringing this forward today. It is no accident that, since we have been back in this place, we have had a motion on the climate emergency and three on crime. After

this debate is a motion on paramilitarism, and tomorrow there is a motion on crime against older people. I think that that speaks volumes, and I believe that Members have hit on something out there: crime, the fear of crime and the impact that that has on society.

Many Members talked about crime statistics and how they rise and fall, but usually how they rise, rise and rise. When I see that I see two things. I see a real problem, but I also see an uncovering of a problem. It is probably the truth that, for far too long, domestic violence was taking place behind closed doors, behind walls. We did not know, and we did not want to know. That would be shameful for any society if that were the case, but, now that we do know, we have to do something about it. I appeal to the Minister again, because I know that this is one of the things that she is going to take very seriously and it is a priority for her. We need to see this legislation as quickly as possible, and we need to see it implemented as quickly as possible. We need the PSNI to take it seriously, and putting it on a legislative basis will do that. I am not saying that they are not taking it seriously now, but they need the tools at their disposal to make this problem right. It is a massive problem. I, like many Members, could probably tell stories about domestic violence cases or suspicions, and there was one time when I witnessed things out in the back garden, and it happened to be that that domestic violence manifested itself outside and continued out, and people were then able to witness it.

I also have experience of one punch devastating lives. It has devastated the life of one individual and all the family connected. That is hard to take for friends and family, and it is hard to take for the individual. Doug is right when he talks about victims, and a question that has to be posed is this: do we support victims properly? Do we really? Do we give them the support, from all sectors of society and from all our Departments, that they need to recover? That is something that we need to really take seriously. Detail is important here. Pat raised the issue of people being missed in the system and who, through experiences in their younger days, maybe return or turn to violence and believe that to be an acceptable way of behaviour. I get all that, but somewhere along the line someone was failed, and that leads to a completely innocent person being in the wrong place at the wrong time and dying or suffering devastating injuries that affect their life and their family for the rest of their life. That is very important. It seems that most violence is fuelled by drug and alcohol abuse. We need to tackle that as well. Those who do not see the drugs in our society are probably the most naive among us. That has to change. We need to shine a light on all of this. Violent crime is not acceptable. Violence is not acceptable, whether it is at home or at a sporting event.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to domestic abuse. Does he believe that, fundamentally, by breaking the stigma of domestic abuse, we will help to eradicate it?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, we must shine a light and open the doors on this. No one should be victimised or subjected to domestic violence or any sort of violence.

In the time remaining, I want to raise an issue that is close to my heart, and I would like the House to take cognisance of it. Before the Assembly fell, I had a private Member's Bill going through, and it was to protect accident and emergency staff — nurses — who are at the cutting edge and are abused daily, sometimes violently. We really need to pick up on that, and I look forward to miscellaneous Bills coming forward so that I get the chance to do so. I know that Dolores is very keen on miscellaneous Bills, too. Maybe we could work as a double act, as we have always done.

It is very important that we protect the people who protect us and that we give tougher sentences for assaulting them. Such assaults have a double impact. They impact on the victim, and, if that victim is out of service or cannot do their job, someone will die, so it has an indirect impact on another family's life. The connection will probably never be made, but it means devastation for yet another family, and that is very important. The House should take cognisance of that and protect the people who protect us in this country.

Ms Anderson: Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin. I support the motion and Sinn Féin's amendment. In 2019, there were over 3,000 incidents of domestic violence — violent crime — in my home town of Derry, making up nearly a third of all reported crimes, and a 21% increase since 2018. Derry is in crisis. It is a crisis caused by a decade of neglect and driven by a lack of opportunities for young people, a lack of public services, a lack of quality jobs and a lack of income support. I say that because I agree with what was said about statistical evidence showing a link to poverty and economic deprivation and how that has been identified as one of the root causes of violent crime. That link makes it even more important that the Executive tackle and address regional inequalities. In doing so, they must deliver resources on the basis of objective need. That also includes developing legislation to address the impact of the fear of crime on our elderly population. That is being discussed further tomorrow, so I will not go into that.

At the Justice Committee last week, members were given a shocking statistic by the Minister: some 90% of the prison population has some form of alcohol or drug issue. Given the link between the high volume of violent crime, fuelled by alcohol and drugs, those who own clubs and pubs should not be possibly indirectly fuelling such crime by running drinks promotions in our city centres.

In Derry, nearly half of all violent crimes involve domestic abuse.

Mr Catney: I thank the Member for giving way. In my past business, I was involved with public houses. I cannot stress enough that people drank within that controlled atmosphere. Pub owners should not be labelled with all the ills of society. Most of the drink in question is cheap drink that is bought in supermarkets. People are fuelled long before they even go out for a night of socialising. I will make it plain. I will make this point as quickly as I can. You cannot lay all the ills of alcohol abuse at the doors of publicans or public houses.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Anderson: I ask the Member to not be too defensive. Perhaps if he had listened, he would have heard me say "possibly indirectly fuelling". I did not accuse, but I said

that there was an onus and responsibility on those who own clubs and pubs to understand the link between drinks promotions and violence.

To go back to what I was saying: Derry has the highest level of domestic violence incidents in the North, and, according to the PSNI, there were 1,519 domestic abuse crimes recorded last year alone. That is four crimes per day; four too many. Domestic violence is not confined to age, gender or sexuality, yet it is absolutely staggering that 67% of victims of domestic violence are females, while 86% of abusers are male.

I express my appreciation of local organisations that support victims, such as La Dolce Vita Project and the Men's Action Network. In particular, I commend the work done by Foyle Women's Aid, which, each year, supports nearly 3,000 women and children who are directly affected by domestic abuse.

Last year, domestic abuse incidents increased by 6%, and we are told that that represented 16% of all crimes recorded in the North. It is unfortunate but also welcome that more women are seeking help for domestic abuse, yet there are still countless other victims who are suffering in silence and trapped behind closed doors. I would like to address them today. When every call, text message or post on social media is scrutinised by your abuser; when you are forced to do things because, if you do not, your abuser will hit you or your child; and when you are led to believe that everything is your fault and that you are alone in the world, do not feel isolated. There are organisations, like La Dolce Vita Project, Foyle Women's Aid and Women's Aid all over the North, that are there to help you. Domestic abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual and violent. La Dolce Vita Project in Derry offers one-to-one counselling for those impacted by domestic abuse and has been doing sterling work, highlighting the impact of parental alienation and perpetrators who unfortunately use the courts to further their domestic abuse. I spoke to the Minister about that at the Committee last week. Parental alienation is recognised by the World Health Organization as —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Ms Anderson: — emotional or physical harm caused to children by the parent-child relationship. I ask the Minister to consider it in the domestic violence Bill in the time ahead. There is much more that I could say, but time does not permit.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on our amendment to this very important motion, which highlights the fact that violent crime and alcohol- and drug-related offences are on the increase. PSNI statistics confirm an alarming trend, with over 106,000 recorded offences during the 2019 calendar year; an increase of over 7% when compared with the previous 12 months in 2018. All but one of the policing districts experienced a higher level of crime last year compared with the previous year, with the Ards and North Down District, in my constituency, the only district with a 2.2% reduction in police-recorded crime in 2019 compared with 2018. Alcohol and drug abuse are the main contributing factors, costing the country hundreds of millions of pounds every year and, tragically, costing too many lives.

Between July 2018 and June 2019, there were 16,575 domestic abuse crimes recorded here, which represents

an alarming increase of 10% on the previous 12 months and the highest rate since records began in 2004-05. Statistics also show an alarming increase in attacks on children, young people and women. The PSNI defines domestic abuse as violent, abusive or threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour by a partner, ex-partner or family member. The abuse can be physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or financial in nature.

6.15 pm

"Domestic abuse" is a much wider term than one might think, and it is also an ever-evolving issue, with the digital age in which we all live opening up so many new challenges. It is worth acknowledging that many efforts have been made at every level in society, from the community and voluntary sector right through to Executive level, to tackle domestic abuse. We see greater awareness and understanding of the issue through education and through effective public awareness campaigns that have highlighted the devastating impact that violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse can have on people's life and family and on our communities. It is important that people speak out and speak up and that they are not afraid to have their voice heard.

It is important that the punishment fit the crime for victims of violent crime. By way of example, the lead story last week in our local paper, the Bangor edition of 'The County Down Spectator', was about a bottle-attack victim who was left with 15 stitches to his face. His violent attacker, who had a criminal record of 106 convictions, escaped jail and was instead given 100 hours of community service and put on probation for three months, leaving the victim and his family disgusted with the judicial system.

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: I will indeed.

Mr Buckley: Does the Member agree that that sentence does nothing but bring additional terror to the family, who have to live every day knowing that the perpetrator is back on the streets so quickly?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has another minute.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. In fact, our whole community is put at risk because the perpetrator is at large.

A joined-up, multi-agency, partnership-based approach is crucial. It should involve the PSNI, councils, policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs), community and voluntary groups working alongside our elected representatives to tackle the problem.

Voluntary groups in my constituency, such as the Ards and north Down street pastors, play an important role. They are often on the front line on dark, wet nights, working with those affected by alcohol and drugs. They play a valuable role in preventing violent crime and must be commended. They even go as far as to collect empty glass bottles, which they recognise can become weapons in the wrong hands.

New PSNI neighbourhood police teams (NPTs) have recently been rolled out and play an important role in our communities. We greatly welcome that initiative and are delighted to see local police in our communities in north Down. They are people whom we already know and people whom we will get to know, and the public gain confidence

in them. There is also an important body of work being done to prevent adverse childhood family experiences, which include exposure to alcohol, drugs abuse and misuse, and domestic abuse, through the provision of greater support for families and young people. Education plays an important role in improving future outcomes and earlier intervention.

Finally, we must continue to strive for better sentencing. We need to see tougher sentencing introduced to deter perpetrators, alongside progress being made on delivering legislation to protect victims of crime.

Mr McGrath: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the motion on violent crime. I also welcome the level of engagement that there has been on the motion and the input from other parties.

An American legislator once said:

“this mindless menace of violence ... which ... stains our land and every one of our lives.”

Most regrettably, 50 years on, “this mindless menace of violence” still overshadows our land and continues to affect the lives of all.

All across the North, men and women suffer, oftentimes in the most awful silence, because of domestic violence. The victims and survivors of institutional abuse have suffered for years as they have sought to speak truth to power and let their story be heard and the evil perpetrated on them rooted out and brought into the light. Young and old alike are attacked in their home and in our very streets, and they must then piece together their life afterwards.

This looming shadow, which stains our land and our lives, has a name, and it is violent crime. My constituency is, in many ways, a rural one, and my home town of Downpatrick is not exempt from that looming shadow. Last year alone, the PSNI in the Downpatrick area recorded 2,395 acts of antisocial behaviour, 1,619 acts of violence and sexual offences and 837 acts of criminal damage and arson. However, the most harrowing truth of this matter is that we may never know the total levels of violent crime occurring across the North, as many people still feel unable to come forward to tell their story.

Members, if like me you feel the same sense of moral outrage that this Assembly did not sit for over three years and did not legislate to combat the shadow of violent crime, then you will agree that we must do more. The sad reality is that the majority of cases of violent crime are underpinned by alcohol or drug consumption. We must do more to rid our society of the scourge of alcohol and drug abuse. I am careful to note that I am not referencing the overwhelming number of people who can have a glass or two of wine or a few pints; I am referencing those who get so intoxicated that they cannot control their behaviour.

Ms Rogan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGrath: Yes.

Ms Rogan: Will the Member agree that poverty also plays a huge part in the violent crimes that are a scourge on our society? In my constituency, in the town you are talking of, one evening a child was brought home to his parents by the PSNI for committing antisocial behaviour, which can lead to violent crime. There was only one light bulb in the house — only one light bulb, no food in the fridge, nothing

in the cupboards. They had to take a burning light bulb out of the upstairs ceiling and bring it down to light the living room so that the parents could have a conversation with the PSNI about their child’s behaviour. A collaborative approach is also needed to deal with this issue, mental health issues, addiction and poverty. It is a huge problem.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can I remind Members that interventions should be brief. The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McGrath: Thank you, and I thank the Member for her intervention. We have a range of issues that we need to address and tackle. Earlier today, I referenced the need for the Executive to deliver on an anti-poverty strategy, because that will start to combat the poverty in our community, and that will then allow some people to receive help and assistance, which may mean they do not have to be in the circumstances that have been mentioned.

I was referencing those who get so intoxicated that they cannot control their behaviour, and it can be a complete stranger in the street or a partner at home who feels the brunt of that abusive behaviour at the end of the night. We must do more — and see more action from the police too, who often get exposed to such violent crime and become the needless targets of such crime as well.

The interventions need to start earlier. I welcomed the announcement made by the Police Service a number of months ago, before this Assembly reconvened, to deploy extra officers back into the community beats or neighbourhood area teams. These officers operated at the coalface, but they were a permanent fixture. People knew them, and they knew people, and those relationships and their network of contacts were used to challenge issues in local communities. I look forward to seeing them again in areas like Downpatrick.

We currently have issues with large groups of young people gathering on Friday afternoons, trying to get passing 18-year-olds to purchase drinks for them. If successful, they consume large amounts of alcohol, and then their behaviour goes downhill. In recent weeks, we have had assaults, threats, intimidation, drug consumption and criminal damage, but the root cause is always the same: large volumes of alcohol being consumed. I want to see the new officers in place soon and challenging this behaviour in Downpatrick. I hope the Minister can tell us today when those new officers will be in place.

We must do more to change attitudes. We must do more to combat paramilitaries who continue to wreak havoc across the North. We must do more to seek ways to prevent reoffending. We must do more to encourage those who have been the victims of crime to speak up, and most importantly, when they do speak up, we must do more to support the victims.

It was the SDLP who brought this motion to the Assembly, not the Executive or the Department.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McGrath: We want to see positive action being used to challenge these events.

Mr Chambers: I welcome this motion, and the opportunity to speak about the important issues it raises. I also welcome the fact that it recognises the effect of such crime

on victims. It is easy for victims to be forgotten, as they are often just absorbed into official statistics.

A victim of a violent crime does not seek to become one. However, once someone decides to make them a victim, they are plunged into a world that may be completely alien to them. They will be expected to engage with police officers investigating the crime — an experience that some people who are not used with engaging with the police may find a daunting challenge. They may also have to face the ordeal of attending an identity parade, followed by long days sitting in a courtroom if a suspect is charged and a case is made against their assailant. That will be followed by a grilling from the defendant's barrister when they enter the witness box. They may then decide to seek compensation, which they are legally entitled to for their injuries, both physical and mental. That can become the biggest ordeal that the victim has had to face up to that point. Suddenly, they may feel that they have become the person standing in the dock, being faced down rather than supported by the authorities.

I have been there. My family has been there, simply because we run a family retail business that trades in cash. My daughter, who was 16 at the time, was present in the shop when an armed gang entered the premises and ordered customers to the floor at gunpoint. My daughter had the barrel of a gun placed into her mouth by an assailant, who was reeking of alcohol, to make her compliant with the robbers' demands. I shared the trauma of her attempting to cope with that incident. She attended psychological counselling for over a year to help deal with it. Her claim for compensation from the criminal injuries compensation scheme was initially rejected and, after appearing at an appeals hearing, she was granted the minimum award.

In my own case, I was attacked late one Sunday evening by an assailant wielding a hatchet. The assailant pushed me to the ground and hit me several times around the legs with the weapon, drawing blood. In the meantime, my wife was being threatened by the other robber, who was waving a hammer around her head. Those events made us both extremely apprehensive of every stranger who came through the door of the business for months afterwards.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I want to put on record high praise to him for sharing his experience with us. In the context of what he has just said, does he not find it incredible that people think that the DUP amendment is too focused on the criminal justice system? People who behave in that manner should be subject to the full rigour of the criminal justice system.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Chambers: I thank the Member for the intervention. Absolutely.

My claim for compensation was rejected as my injuries did not meet the threshold, and neither had I sought professional help for my psychological ordeal. Furthermore, I had not lost any time off work, and apparently that went against me. Other self-employed businesspeople will know that they do not enjoy the luxury of taking time off work while they are still standing. A High Court judge thought the ordeal was worthy of an eight-year custodial sentence for my assailant after a jury found him guilty of causing me actual bodily harm. Obviously, a

pen-pusher in the compensation service did not share the learned judge's opinion, nor that of the jury, of what had happened to me. My experiences gave me no confidence that victims of violent crime are considered as anything more than a number. More care and support for victims should be the trademark of any caring and compassionate government.

I had experience of dealing with government agencies through my political activities, but still ran into a stone wall of negativity that I struggled to penetrate. What chance has the average citizen of coping with a system that appears to be designed to knock them back, rather than to recognise what they have been put through by a situation not of their making?

The personal experiences I have described are only a couple of examples of robberies and crime that my family business has been subjected to over the years. The common denominator has been that they all have been driven by criminals attempting to obtain money for drugs. That is the catalyst that needs to be addressed. Violent crime is not about getting money to put food on the table, but rather stealing money or goods to settle drug debts. They will always target the softest targets. Their violence is driven by the urgent need to feed their drug habit. Two of the people involved in robberies of my business died suddenly as a result of drug abuse some months after attacking us.

Another vulnerable group that is subject to violence is our front-line emergency personnel. Courts should take a zero-tolerance approach to attacks on fire, police, ambulance and medical staff. We should ensure that the courts have the tools to make such violence unattractive by allowing them to impose sentences that are a serious deterrent.

We owe that duty of care to our emergency services.

It should be said, by way of reassurance, that the vast majority of our citizens will never fall victim to a violent crime. That is not to minimise the impact on those who have fallen victim. We must ensure that the police have the resources to thoroughly investigate such crimes with full and unfettered access to forensic services.

6.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Chambers: The courts should also have available a range of sentences that recognise and reflect the seriousness of violent conduct.

Ms Sugden: I support the motion. Although they are mutually exclusive, I support both amendments, as each raises important considerations about how we genuinely and effectively tackle violent crime in Northern Ireland. I will, however, prioritise my support for amendment No 2. That amendment encourages a Northern Ireland Executive approach to tackle the issues by addressing the root cause of the problem rather than the symptoms. I will, however, acknowledge amendment No 1, tabled by Mr Storey and Mr Givan. If amendment No 1 were a stand-alone motion, it would have my full support, but, unfortunately, it competes with amendment No 2, which I see as the most realistic and long-term route for tackling violent crime, including the various types noted in that amendment.

I am not entirely content with the wording of the original motion, but I support the general principle that identifies the relationship between violent crime and alcohol and drugs and the harm that that causes in communities. I would prefer that we called on all Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive to address the issue rather than just the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, which is why I support amendment No 2.

Please, Minister, bear with me when I say that the Department of Justice could be described as the "Department of Failure". When all other Departments have failed in providing high-quality public services, protecting the most vulnerable in society and offering genuine opportunities for children and young people for a better life, the Department of Justice picks up the pieces. When a perpetrator commits a crime, it is too late. It is too late for victims and their families, too late for wider society, too late for the perpetrator and too late for public finances. What point is not too late? Is it adulthood, early adulthood, adolescence, childhood, early years or even in the womb? The point I am trying to make is that no one is born bad and, definitely, no one is born a perpetrator of violent crime or, indeed, any other type of crime. They are a product of their environment, circumstances and opportunities. Not having a roof over their head, a hot meal on the table or access to quality education will affect the people they become. If Government, whose job it is to serve and protect their people by providing a minimum public service, as outlined above, do not do that, those people will turn to crime and criminality dressed up as paramilitarism. It is the cost of failure, and all society will suffer. As well as calling on the Minister of Justice, I call on every Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive to do their job, to work together, to provide public services and to improve what we have so that violent crime, paramilitary activity or any other type of criminal behaviour is not the preferred option.

It is inevitable that we will address symptoms of a broken society and poor public services and that people will commit crimes, but maybe we should take a walk upstream and address where those problems began. There is no point in emptying the sink if you do not turn off the tap. The correlation between the rise of crime and alcohol- and drug-related offences is entirely valid. Again, we can seek to address alcohol- and drug abuse-related crime, or we can try to understand why people abuse alcohol and drugs, which leads them on a path of criminal behaviour. I suspect that much is to do with poor mental health and early childhood trauma, among other reasons. I really appreciate a number of Members acknowledging the impact of trauma and sharing their own stories. At this point, I want to stress that I am not providing excuses for criminal behaviour. I am providing reasons with the hope that, if we address those reasons, we prevent crime and, most importantly, we prevent the creation of victims.

A considerable number of domestic abuse incidents are reported to the police each year. The number that go unreported does not bear thinking about. Despite the shortcomings of the Assembly in not sitting for three years, I genuinely do not understand why it took so long to address the issue. It is to society's shame and to the Assembly's shame that we have not legislated before now. Our shame is that a wooden table has more justice in Northern Ireland than a victim of domestic abuse.

I fully support and commend the Minister for agreeing to legislate as soon as possible. I understand that it can happen here as quickly as in Westminster and that we can tailor it to meet our specific needs.

I sought to address domestic abuse for a number of reasons —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close.

Ms Sugden: — not least the reasons that I have outlined. Domestic abuse in itself is a trauma that can lead to mental health and addiction issues that can then lead to criminal behaviour. We need to break that cycle. We can do that through domestic abuse legislation, but we need to look more widely at other traumas.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Linda Dillon to make her winding-up speech on amendment No 2 — sorry, I missed a bit. I call the Justice Minister, Naomi Long, to respond to the debate.

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): I put on record my gratitude to the Members for Upper Bann, South Down and Mid Ulster for bringing the motion to the House and to the Members who tabled amendments to expand on the debate that we have had. I also thank all those who participated in the discussions, and I very much welcome the opportunity to respond.

I share Members' concerns about violent crime. No crime is acceptable, and those that involve violence can be particularly traumatic for the victim. It is, however, important to remember at the outset that, with some of the crimes that involve violence against the person, such as domestic violence, the statistics are rising at least partially as a result of an increase in support for victims to report and the consequential increase in reporting levels. The more we know about those types of crime, the more we can try to address them effectively. Whilst I, again, stress that no crime, particularly violent crime, is acceptable, it is also important to reassure Members of the Assembly and, importantly, members of the public that levels of crime across Northern Ireland generally are low. Police-recorded crime statistics show us that it is about 40% lower in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales. Nonetheless, I recognise that that is no comfort for victims. Alan Chambers set out very passionately the wider long-term consequences of violent crime for those who are affected by it.

Ensuring that communities are safe, resilient and supported is an absolute priority for me. I am also very conscious of the underlying issues and risk factors that increase the likelihood of people offending, which Mr Pat Sheehan and others set out, and I want to take some time to set out the work that my Department is doing to address that.

We recognise that drugs and alcohol misuse is cross-cutting and impacts on people's lives at every level in Northern Ireland. It can lead to crime committed to fuel drug dependence and to fuel the organised criminality, violence and exploitation that often go hand in hand with production and supply and paramilitarism. It can also cause untold damage and loss to families and individuals. It is difficult to know exactly how many people in Northern Ireland use illicit drugs or misuse prescription drugs; however, I, like others, am concerned by the apparent upward trend in risk-taking behaviour, as evidenced by increases in seizures, arrests and, most worryingly,

drug-related deaths. I am committed to ongoing work with partners to end the harm caused by the illicit supply and misuse of drugs and alcohol, and my Department and law enforcement agencies clearly have key roles to play in that. However, as Dolores Kelly and others rightly stated, it is also clear that they are issues that justice and policing alone cannot solve. They require collaborative, joined-up and holistic responses across a wide range of partners to successfully tackle the interaction between substance misuse and poverty, deprivation, mental health and adverse childhood incidents. I am grateful for the strong partnerships that already exist through the Organised Crime Task Force, policing and community safety partnerships, drug and alcohol coordination teams and the structures that underpin the delivery of the Department of Health's new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs. The Executive have committed to an ongoing cross-departmental response to deal with those issues, and that collaborative approach to improving prosperity and well-being for all will be reflected in the draft Programme for Government commitments and is reflected in 'New Decade, New Approach'.

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the specific actions that have already been taken forward in the Department of Health-led Executive strategy 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs: Phase 2' to prevent and address the harms related to substance misuse in Northern Ireland. It is also an opportunity to raise the Health-led work that is ongoing to shape and develop the new substance misuse strategy, which is aimed at preventing the use and misuse of substances, reducing harm and maintaining recovery. In liaison with the Department of Health, my Department will focus on how the new strategy can strengthen the powers to reduce drug supply and support those vulnerable to offending or to being a victim of offending by developing initiatives to identify at an early stage individuals with problems and ensure that appropriate action to reduce the harm of substance use is implemented. My Department already engages with these issues in innovative ways. Ultimately, addressing the root causes of problematic behaviour will result in fewer offenders, fewer victims and more confident and safer families and communities. From a criminal justice perspective, I have a vested interest. We know that people with drug and alcohol problems and other health-related issues are more likely to come into contact with the justice system.

We support local work through the PCSPs, which work with communities to address safety concerns. Many of those initiatives will help to address alcohol and drug issues in local areas. One is the Remove All Prescription and Illegal Drug (RAPID) bins, which help to remove illegal and prescription drugs from the streets. So far, they have proved successful, with tens of thousands of drugs being deposited regularly into bins located throughout Northern Ireland.

The Department has made a substantial commitment to tackle the root causes of offending through problem-solving justice approaches that aim to reduce harmful behaviour in families and the wider community. Practical interventions are already being delivered. As an early-stage intervention — something raised by a number of Members, including Colin McGrath — my Department works with schools to raise awareness among young people of the consequences of the abuse of alcohol

and drugs. That includes using drama such as the play 'Blackout' to explore how misuse can lead to antisocial behaviour or more serious criminal activity and violent crime, leading then to coming to the attention of the criminal justice system. The inter-agency work of support hubs is another way in which we work collaboratively to reduce the vulnerability of individuals who may be susceptible to offending through alcohol or drug use or to being a victim of violent crime. My Department will continue to support the development of that model, which, in addition to helping to improve people's situation, reduces the demand on services such as the police, allowing them to focus on crime prevention. The substance misuse courts provide another approach to helping individuals when substance misuse is the underlying problem. It seeks to tackle the root causes of their criminal behaviour and provide specialist support and interventions to help people to turn their life around. It allows a judge to direct individuals to an intensive treatment programme before sentencing to help to address their addictions and change their behaviour. Evaluation of the approach is ongoing, but the early indications are positive. Those are just three of the problem-solving pilot projects that the Department delivers to address the root causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. Through them, we collectively provide effective support to the individuals who most need it, and, in doing so, we make our communities safer.

Supporting individuals is crucial. However, a comprehensive response must also deliver effective enforcement action, and a number of Members referred to that. I acknowledge the important role of the Organised Crime Task Force here in providing a strategic lead on multi-agency activity to disrupt the illicit supply of drugs to communities. I also pay tribute to the operational response of the law enforcement agencies. They work collaboratively to disrupt the importation, supply and distribution of drugs. In the 2018-19 financial year, they delivered increased operational success, with increased drug seizures and drug-related arrests.

The Organised Crime Task Force gives a specific focus to drug-related deaths. It works collaboratively to gain a fuller picture of the issue and causes so that agencies can target resources at the areas of most need. The task force also tracks trends and emerging behaviours so that we can respond to them. That work will inform how we work with partners in the health and social care and voluntary sectors to educate the public about the risks of alcohol and substance misuse, particularly those associated with polydrug use. I concur with John Blair's comments on the misuse of prescription medication, which has serious consequences.

I repeat my reassurance that levels of violent crime across Northern Ireland are relatively low. However, that does not give grounds for complacency. I am committed to working with partners across government and law enforcement to put in place appropriate measures to keep people safe from crime and reduce the fear of crime, which Paul Frew rightly identified as often being much higher than the actual level of crime but which can impact on people's freedom to live their life confidently.

Offenders who are convicted of violent offences will, in many circumstances, be subject to public protection arrangements and will be assessed and managed on a multi-agency basis to ensure that we keep the public

safe. I am pleased that, in the current financial year, my Department has been able to reinvest nearly £1 million of recovered criminal assets through the assets recovery community scheme to support the delivery of projects designed to reduce crime and the fear of crime across Northern Ireland. Not only does the scheme provide a strong visible message that crime does not pay but, by funding projects like cold-calling and DNA-marking schemes and other strategic crime prevention initiatives, it helps to protect individuals who are often vulnerable and to make them feel safer in their homes and communities.

6.45 pm

I will focus for a moment on the importance of feeling safe and being safe in your home. Violent crime does not happen just on the streets; sadly, it often happens within families. It is important to recognise that domestic abuse involves not solely physical violence but often controlling, coercive behaviours, psychological and financial, that have long-term consequences for the victim and the wider family, as Paul Givan noted. Worryingly, they are often invisible to those outside the immediate relationship. Domestic abuse is about more than just physical violence; equally serious is the often hidden abuse that goes on behind closed doors.

While we continue to see an increase in the reporting of domestic violence and abuse crimes, that is also a positive reflection of an increased willingness to come forward and report to the police. There is, however, more to be done to further encourage reporting, both through having comprehensive legislation and providing support to those who are affected by domestic abuse. I have announced my intention to bring a domestic abuse Bill through the Assembly to create a new domestic abuse offence for Northern Ireland. I assure Paul Frew that, with fair wind, I intend to do so prior to the Easter recess. It will capture patterns of coercive or controlling behaviour and send a clear message that domestic abuse in all its forms is wrong — not just illegal but culturally unacceptable. We must end the cycle of multigenerational harm and dysfunction to which Pat Sheehan and others referred and Martina mentioned particularly.

The use and abuse of family courts to maintain contact and the manipulation of children through parental alienation also need to be addressed. It will not be possible to make it a specific offence in this Bill. However, I draw the Member's attention to coercive behaviour, which will be covered by the Bill, and the fact that any behaviour involving or witnessed by a child is an aggravating factor when it comes to sentencing. As part of the Bill, crimes with a domestic abuse motivation may also attract increased sentencing as an aggravating factor as a result of the domestic abuse element. That is in addition to the new domestic abuse offence. There are opportunities here to make a real difference, and I put on record my thanks to Claire Sugden for the work that she has done.

I turn now to victim support services. As well as the necessary protections against abuse and violent crime more generally, we need a consistent regional support service for victims and witnesses of crime, as Doug Beattie and others identified. My Department funds Victim Support NI and the NSPCC Young Witness Service to provide support services to adults and young victims and witnesses of crime. By next year, we want to have in place

a new advocacy support service for victims of domestic and sexual abuse that seeks to provide the best possible service with the funding available.

Violent sexual crime and the Gillen review was raised by Dolores Kelly. Along with others, I am keen to see progress made on those recommendations. Not all of them will fall to Justice to deliver, but my officials are working with criminal justice and voluntary sector organisations. An action plan is being progressed to ensure, particularly in the first phase, that the recommendations that impact on victims are expedited.

A number of Members raised the issue of reducing reoffending. For those who commit violent crime and those affected by it alike, a custodial sentence is an important part of the justice process. It reflects the harm caused to victims and society by those actions and is needed to uphold the rule of law and to maintain public confidence in the justice system. However, a key element in any sentence for those who commit a crime and those who are affected by it must be a focus on rehabilitation to reduce reoffending and ensure positive outcomes. It is incredibly important that we see the role of prisons not just as a punishment but as keeping people safe and ensuring that, on release, there will be reduced reoffending and, ultimately, fewer victims of crime.

I share the concerns that were voiced about the harms caused to our community and to vulnerable individuals through the misuse of drugs and alcohol and through violent crime. While Northern Ireland continues to have relatively low levels of crime, such statistics can only be cold comfort to individuals who suffer loss as a result of the supply of illicit drugs or who have been victims of violent crime or domestic violence. I am committed to ongoing work with my Executive colleagues to tackle that harm and to support and protect the vulnerable, particularly noting the importance of the interfaces that exist between my Department and that of my colleague the Health Minister. I look forward to strengthening and deepening our partnerships to deliver against our shared outcome of a safe Northern Ireland where we respect the law and respect each other.

Ms Dillon: I begin by thanking the Minister for her comments. I will not go over everything that everyone said, but I support the motion and ask Members to support amendment No 2.

Dolores Kelly outlined some of the issues around the Gillen review, and that is the greatest example of the need for cross-departmental collaboration. Gillen, in his recommendations, touched on every Department.

Doug Beattie argued for a victims' commissioner, and the Minister has already responded to that suggestion. Nobody is necessarily opposed to that, but you have to decide whether it is the best use of resources.

Paul Frew commented on attacks on healthcare staff. I absolutely agree with him, but it goes back to the question of what is the root cause. My mother was a healthcare assistant in Daisy Hill Hospital, and she was badly injured one night by a patient who injured her accidentally. She was encouraged to make a statement against that individual, but she said, "That gentleman is extremely ill. He did not intend to injure me, and, therefore, I do not feel that any kind of sentence or judicial process would be beneficial to anybody in this case". That goes back to

what Christopher Stalford said, and it is the reason why we cannot support the DUP amendment. Whilst, to be fair, in essence, it is a good enough amendment, it probably has too much focus on the judicial process and not enough on tackling the root causes.

There is little that Claire Sugden said that I do not agree with. She is absolutely right: if people have reached the judicial system, we have failed them in every possible way. That is the essence of the motion. I thank our colleagues in the SDLP for tabling the motion.

I place on record my thanks to Alan Chambers for outlining his personal story; I know that that is not easy to do. I understand that being a victim of this type of crime has a lasting impact, and he is to be commended for bringing that to the House's attention today.

Our amendment is set in the context of prevention and early intervention. That is essential in order to reduce violent crime, whether it is domestic and sexual violence or attacks on our elderly or on those who are vulnerable. Those who are vulnerable are the victims of crime and, as well, those who are vulnerable are the perpetrators of crime. That is why we tabled our amendment.

To address root causes, all Departments need to work together. As we well know, people who end up in the criminal justice system overwhelmingly have issues with mental health and with substance and alcohol misuse and come from the areas of highest deprivation. There is some good collaborative working going on in some areas, particularly between Health and Justice, specifically on prisons and the PSNI. Whilst that is welcome, as we have already outlined, by the time the individual has come into contact with the criminal justice system, we have failed them.

The Education and Communities Departments have their role to play, particularly through the Youth Service but also in our school system, in identifying where children are at risk. The Department for Communities can play a part by addressing deprivation and housing need. DAERA has a role, particularly on rural crime and isolation, which can make people more vulnerable to being the victim of crime. The Minister for the Economy, as part of her portfolio, needs to look at where we can provide skills, training and employment in areas of high deprivation, and, as this will have to be financed, the Minister of Finance has an important role to play in any strategic approach to dealing with the root causes. Those are the reasons that this cannot simply be a matter for Justice and Health. All Departments have their role to play. We need to focus on addressing the root causes.

When a violent crime is committed, the punishment must fit the crime — on that, I agree with many Members across the House — particularly where there is loss of life or serious physical or psychological injury. Subsequent sentencing should reflect the seriousness of the crime: that is what families and society as a whole expect. However, nothing can replace the benefit of prevention. Families who have lost a loved one or have been victims of violent crime can attest to that. We also need to ensure that there is a focus on rehabilitation, as that is the only way to tackle reoffending effectively. The Minister has referred to that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Ms Dillon: Sorry. We need to have a proper strategic approach to ensure that we implement good policy that reduces the risk of people ending up in the criminal justice system in the first place.

I just want to outline one case that was brought to me recently by a school principal —

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

Ms Dillon: — who highlighted to me the need for nurture in his school —

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

Ms Dillon: I think that some leeway was given to others.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member, please, take her seat?

Ms Dillon: The need for nurture in his school to address this is where it begins.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member, please, take her seat? Thank you.

Mr Storey: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate as we conclude on the issues that have been raised. Rather than rehearse all the issues that Members have raised, I will make a few comments on what has brought us to this point. Obviously, we are disappointed that the proposer of the motion will not accept our amendment and that, when Mr Blair was making his remarks, he did not refer to the last part of our amendment, which calls on the Minister of Justice:

“to work collaboratively with the Minister of Health and victims’ advocates to introduce an action plan and a resourced implementation plan”.

The issue of collaboration was there.

While I welcome the fact that the Minister is here, it is disappointing that nowhere throughout her comments did she make any reference to the amendments or what her view would be. I trust that that does not send out a signal to those who are a blight on our society, whether they are criminals who go under the guise of paramilitaries — we will come to that shortly — or just thugs who are determined to destroy communities and destroy people's lives, that, somehow, there is no place for the criminal justice system. I want to see those who break the law pay the price for doing so. A society that does not have that approach will, in a way, become diverted from actually seeing those who are responsible being brought to justice. Therefore, I am somewhat disappointed in the Minister and the approach that she has taken, even though the previous Minister indicated that her review, which is now complete, gave us a raft of sentencing that needs to be addressed so that we have a judicial system and a sentencing regime that is fit for purpose and, more importantly, fits the crimes of those who have destroyed lives.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want to point out that, while the sentencing review is complete, its outcomes or conclusions have not been enacted. I would also point him to the part of my speech where I said that the criminal justice system had an important role to play, because he must have missed that in my original remarks.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister. This is the place to have that debate. I look forward to seeing what she brings forward. We can all come to the House, make comments on Twitter and try to salve our consciences by saying that we have done our best for the people that we claim to represent, but the test will be the legislation that we can enact and that can be effective in dealing with those who want to break the law and destroy lives.

I concur with my colleague who moved amendment No 1, the Chair of the Committee for Justice. He gave us the statistics.

The sad reality is that, when we come to debates like this and others, we use statistics, but, as has often been said — we have been given examples in the House this evening — behind all of those figures are individuals, families and communities who have been destroyed because of those activities. We need to ensure that we do not forget that.

7.00 pm

Let us not forget that violent and sexual offences are becoming more prevalent. Victims of those crimes will not be comforted by the Minister saying to us this evening that we are better than the rest of the United Kingdom. Although that is the case — the figures indicate that that is so — it gives no comfort to female victims in particular, because crimes against females are becoming more harmful; they account for almost 49% of all violence-against-the-person offences. My colleague gave the figures for those particular crimes.

We could go down those lists of figures, but it is also important to highlight an issue that came to the Policing Board just a few weeks ago: the pathfinder initiative on custody nurse practitioners (CNPs) in Musgrave Street police station. It has seen very good outcomes; it has resulted in a reduction in referrals to emergency departments from Musgrave station of some 42%. I have written to the Health Minister to ensure that funding is in place —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Storey: — so that it cannot be used as a football to determine who pays the bill, rather than ensure that those who need help will get the help that they rightfully deserve.

Mr McGlone: I thank all of the Members who have contributed to the debate here today. It is very important. As my colleague Dolores Kelly said at the start, it is imperative to answer the Members across the Chamber by saying that we have a cross-departmental approach to these issues. She cited school failures and mental health, which draw in education, health, housing, youth services and, as was mentioned during the debate, anti-poverty strategies to try to tackle some of the root causes associated with violence of that scale.

I pay tribute to — it has been mentioned somewhat — the likes of Women's Aid and Nexus, which are very often at the forefront of providing help and assistance to those most affected through some of the most vulnerable and difficult times of their lives. I am sure that all of us here have, through our offices, helped to support people and have seen the really good work that is carried out by those

organisations — on many occasions, quietly and beneath the radar, but of vital importance.

Paul Givan explained the impact of violent crime. He said that it requires a wider response from society. He nodded in the direction of — we will support the Sinn Féin amendment — support for an extensive and cross-departmental approach to the issue. He referred to an increase in violent crime. All of us would like sentencing to match the level of the violent crime, but we have to look at some of the root causes of that as well, hence the need for a cross-departmental approach. He cited the evidence of trauma inflicted on a family. I suppose that many of us have cases that we can refer to in our own localities. While some are pretty traumatic for the families, those that stick out for us are especially the ones that involve children. We should not forget about those children; some very vicious cases have been before the courts. Trauma inflicted on a family could be on the wife, partner or husband, or it could be on those innocents lying in their cots. Reference was made to increased offences of drug misuse and alcohol abuse, which we all know instances of.

Pat Sheehan referred to the three-stranded approach, if we can call it that: the need for legislation, early intervention and rehabilitation. I thank him for being so concise in outlining that to us. He went on to refer to adverse childhood experiences and insights into the prison population and those coming from disadvantaged areas, and attendant issues such as self-harming and suicide, again bringing us back to mental health often being an underlying factor for people who wind up in prison.

Doug Beattie supported the motion and the amendments. He made reference to not forgetting victims, and I do not think that any of us would do that. Some people have come through awful traumas in their lives, and it would be totally immoral to forget those people and not provide support for them.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGlone: Linda? Yes.

Ms Dillon: Does the Member agree that we are absolutely not forgetting about victims in this, because very often the perpetrators were themselves victims and that is how they became perpetrators?

Mr McGlone: Yes, there is that element of recidivism that comes about, and we hear of families where that is the case. Some have carried that family experience with them and inflicted it on others. In some of those families, that has, unfortunately, become accepted behaviour, which is an awful aspect of life in some households.

John Blair referred to increased collaboration, victims of crime and seeking solutions on an education-wide and cross-departmental basis. He also referred to the substance abuse courts and multi-agency triage.

Paul Frew referred to his previous efforts on domestic violence as well as the issues of one-punch attacks and drink-driving. He talked about the need to give support to victims. In an intervention, Jonny Buckley referred to domestic violence and the importance of doing the right thing. Paul Frew referred back to the private Member's legislation. An important point concerned emergency personnel, doctors, nurses and others who may be subject to assaults while trying to care for people.

Martina Anderson referred to the incidence of violent crime, citing in particular her own city of Derry, where there has been a significant increase in the amount of problems associated with violent crime. She rightly referred to those problems and the lack of quality jobs, the heightened increases in poverty and urban deprivation and how that is associated with violent crime.

Gordon Dunne referred to the need for the voluntary sector and its involvement in particular schemes — he cited a number of schemes in Bangor. He also talked about the effect of violent and abusive behaviour, justice for victims and the punishment fitting the crime. He also referred to the PCSPs, the PSNI and community and voluntary groups: again, a local policy that fits the needs of a local town.

Colin McGrath referred to people suffering in silence because of awful domestic abuse, both young and old, and the need for an anti-poverty strategy to help to tackle some of the root causes of violent and criminal behaviour. He also referred to investment, the recent announcement on local policing initiatives and the importance of local police knowing their local areas and the people in them. He also referred to the ability of young people to access alcohol, which leads on to drug use or drug abuse and antisocial behaviour.

Alan Chambers told his personal, harrowing story of violence. That would have been truly traumatic for any family to come through, and I hope that the proper support was provided to you and your family, Alan, at the time and since.

Claire Sugden referred to her experience at the Department and explained that, at the end of the day, the Department was expected to pick up the pieces. She spoke of the need for cross-departmental cooperation on mental health, education, sport and an anti-poverty strategy. The current Minister thanked her for her hard work during her time as Minister.

The Minister in her response referred to the need for cross-departmental initiatives, for those initiatives to support the vulnerable and for victims to get the necessary support. She cited a number of the Department's initiatives to help to try to tackle violent and antisocial behaviour. She referred to the substance misuse court and the fact that it and other pilot projects seem to be, at this stage, rendering some useful benefits in their progress, albeit that they are pilot projects. She responded on effective enforcement, referring to the Organised Crime Task Force and, again, a multi-agency approach to dealing with a number of these issues, including where the source of some of this criminal activity is organised crime. We will come to that topic later. She spoke about the importance of the assets recovery scheme and of drawing those assets to put them back into the community to help to support efforts to piece communities back together.

Linda Dillon talked about the motion in her intervention, and I thank her for that. She spoke about the necessity for cross-departmental support and cross-departmental initiatives, which has been the common theme running through the debate. Indeed, it was referred to during the debate, including, I think, by the Minister, that it would be part of the Programme for Government. All the parties adhered to that position, so that might be useful.

Mervyn Storey said that he was disappointed by some of the approaches being taken.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McGlone: In conclusion, we support the Sinn Féin amendment, given that it embraces that necessary cross-departmental and multi-agency approach to tackling some of the worst excesses of violence and domestic crime.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 32; Noes 42.

AYES

Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mr Beattie, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr M Bradley and Mr Robinson.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Ms C Kelly, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Mr McNulty, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Dillon and Mr McGrath.

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Ms Sugden

Question accordingly negated.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern about increasing levels of violent crime; recognises that this has been accompanied by a similar rise in alcohol and drug-related offences; notes the effect of such crime on victims and on communities across Northern Ireland; further notes that comprehensive legislation protecting victims of domestic violence has yet to be passed; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work collaboratively with Executive Ministers to bring forward an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending, including by addressing the root causes of offending behaviour such as addiction, mental illness, and poverty.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

7.30 pm

Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland

Mr Beattie: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises that many communities across Northern Ireland are still living under siege from paramilitary gangs; reiterates its total rejection of those who continue to engage in criminality, intimidation and coercive control; gives its full support to the agencies working to close down criminal networks and activity; and calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other agencies are properly resourced to allow them to increase their efforts in addressing ongoing paramilitarism.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List.

Mr Beattie: I will be supporting the SDLP's amendment because it adds value to the motion, and anything that adds value is positive.

Paramilitarism is a scourge on our society and on all our communities. Those involved in paramilitarism are self-serving individuals who are involved for profit, for self-proclaimed status, to control the working class with violence distilled through fear and for the promotion of a separated society that creates a sense of distrust of the other community. When I say paramilitary groups, I mean the UVF, I mean the UDA, I mean the INLA, I mean RAAD, I mean PIRA, CIRA, RIRA and all others shades of paramilitary terrorist groups. There can be no difference.

In 2010, 12 years after the Belfast Agreement, we still had 94 violent paramilitary crimes: that was 37 shootings and 57 assaults. The effects are the same, whether it is a gun, or a stick, or a bat, or a nail or a hammer, the results are exactly the same: ruined lives.

In 2016, the year we introduced the action plan on tackling paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime, there was a total of 85 attacks. The split between the trend for shooting and assaults remained pretty much the same, and this went up in 2018, before the latest statistics from 2019, where we now sit again at the 2016 figure of 85 violent paramilitary attacks — more than one a week. It is as if nothing has changed, even with the paramilitary task force, but we all in this House know that lots has changed because there is more to paramilitarism than just violent attacks.

We have a duty in this Assembly to show leadership in the tackling of paramilitarism, in word and in deed. We cannot shy away from it. I look to the Sinn Féin benches, and I know you do not want to hear it, but it is important that you do hear it, because your link with the IRA and the army council is destroying our society. Your argument that it does not exist just does not hold water.

The murder of Robert McCartney — that despicable, disgraceful crime — was met with a wall of silence, as was the murder of Paul Quinn in 2007, where the Sinn Féin MLA met the IRA to assure himself that they were not involved. But they were involved. Then he gave them cover by saying Paul Quinn was involved in criminality. After the

violent death of that young lad, they besmirched his name. It is absolutely disgraceful. Sinn Féin must distance itself from the IRA — past and present — and it must do so vigorously. There is no place for a political party that has a military wing; there is no place for a military wing that has a political party.

Unionism must also take a hard look at itself and ensure that it distances itself from loyalist paramilitaries. For far too long, active paramilitaries have torn their communities apart. Loyalist paramilitaries are responsible for extortion, intimidation, drug dealing and coercive control — self-styled brigadiers feeding off their communities.

Communities are living in fear of loyalist paramilitaries. In its worst excesses, it results in murder. The murder of Ian Ogle was utterly vile. It was perpetrated in a cowardly manner. The Ogle family represents the reality for many people across working-class areas in Northern Ireland. People out there are still using paramilitary gangs to torment communities. The intimidation of the Ogle family started long before Ian was murdered. A year on from that, the family is still not allowed to grieve in peace. They are still the victims of intimidation and attempts to alienate them from their community.

I pay tribute to the Ogle family — Vera and Toni are in the Gallery — for their steadfastness and courage in seeking justice over the murder of Ian, partner of Vera and father of Toni. The perpetrators are loyalists who say they are protecting their community, but they are doing nothing more than damaging their community, and they must be rooted out. They will be rooted out only if we — all of us in the Chamber — take stock of our actions and words and tell them that they are not acceptable. It is not enough for us to say that it is down to civic community to do that if we do not show leadership.

Of course, resourcing the police is going to help a lot. I hope that we do resource the police, because neighbourhood policing and ward constables are the way forward in order for people to link with a policeman that they know to help them get rid of the paramilitaries.

There must be other practical measures. Society is not balanced in the way we tackle paramilitaries. We try describing paramilitaries as nothing more than criminals or organised crime gangs, and I am in favour of doing that. We seek evidence against them, make arrests, put them through the courts and, if found guilty, jail them. Then we allow drug dealers to classify themselves as politically motivated offenders. We put them in a separated prison regime, where they pick up their title of brigadier, and, when they get released, they bring it back into their communities. It is absolutely ridiculous that, on the outside of prisons, we say, "You're a criminal", but when we put them in prison, we say, "You're a brigadier". When they come out, with their self-importance, the cycle starts all over again.

The House will know that in 2016 I brought forward a motion to end separated prison regimes, for that very reason. My motion gave eight years to reduce and then end that separated regime. If the Assembly had supported me, we would be halfway through that process, and that would have been the point at which we stopped putting in new admissions to the separated prison regime — but you did not. When the chips were down, you did not support it, and we are no further forward. I received abuse and

threats, but I stood here and said that it needed to end, and it does need to end.

We are allowing ourselves and our society to be held hostage by the paramilitaries. The outworking of that is up in the Gallery, if you wish to look: the Ogle family. We should be supporting people like that, and there are many people like that around the country.

Mr Butler: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it is with regret that two of my former colleagues, prison officers David Black and Adrian Ismay, lost their lives perhaps because of our failure to challenge and end the segregated regime, as you have explicitly laid out before us tonight?

Mr Beattie: Thank you for the intervention. You are absolutely right, because the intelligence says that those prison officers were targeted from inside the prison and from inside that prison regime. That separated prison regime targeted two men for murder, and we allow it. It is time that we stopped appeasing them and stood shoulder to shoulder with our communities to say, "No more".

For those who want to make the transition, they need to do so. There should be no inducement: just do it. Move away from it and become something positive in your community. Just move away from it. If you are waiting for somebody to put their hand in their pocket and pull out a wallet and give you money, you have missed the point. It is time to end it for your community's sake, for your children's sake and for your family's sake. If you do not do so, I go back to the very start, when I said, "You do this for profit. You do this for self-interest. You do this because you want to be seen as the big lad, in the pub with a pint, saying, 'I'm the brigadier'".

Mr Speaker: Will the Member start to wind up his remarks, please?

Mr Beattie: For those who do not wish to move away, we need to chase them and root them out. We need to bring every single thing available to get those people, to get the evidence and to get them into jail. When we put them in jail, we treat them like criminals. That is how we will deal with this.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up. Thank you, Member.

Mr McGlone: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "activity;" and insert:

"acknowledges that paramilitarism is being used as a cover for profiteering criminal gangs; further recognises that addressing the pervasive influences of poverty, deprivation and lack of opportunity in working-class communities across Northern Ireland is critical to releasing the grip of criminals; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce unexplained wealth orders to allow the PSNI to disrupt and dismantle these gangs and to work with her Executive colleagues to fully resource the PSNI and other agencies to eradicate the influence of paramilitarism."

I thank the proposer of the motion for delivering —

Mr Speaker: Will you resume your seat for a second?

Mr McGlone: Sorry. Excuse me.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. You will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a

winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. Please open the debate.

Mr McGlone: You should have said, "You should've known better". *[Laughter.]* Thank you for that. It is getting a wee bit late.

I thank the proposers of the motion for tabling the debate. The presence, prevalence and insidious influence of paramilitary gangs in our community should be a matter of immense concern for all Members. Their operation as organised paramilitary gangs is in opposition to our collective efforts to sustain peace and to deliver for the people whom we represent through exclusively peaceful means.

Our amendment is designed to be constructive and to build on the sentiment that the proposers have introduced here today by identifying some of the methods by which the new Executive can disrupt and dismantle paramilitary gangs. Those methods may not be exclusive to the Executive themselves. It is also designed to give a voice to those communities who have tried to break from the grip of paramilitarism but feel that, through the cycle of poverty, deprivation and inequality, the odds are stacked against them.

Paramilitarism involves murder, extortion, fuel laundering, cigarettes, drugs, organised crime, human trafficking and prostitution, to name but a few. Tackling those issues needs the involvement of the Organised Crime Task Force, along with HMRC. If Mr Bling, with no apparent means to his name, is sailing about in a BMW, with lots of gold dripping from him, it is not too hard to figure out that, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be an extortionist paramilitary.

Any plan to eradicate the influence of paramilitaries and criminal gangs must recognise that inequality and lack of opportunity are critical recruitment tools for those intent on ruining the lives of a new generation. If we want to stop them, we need to provide those communities with the opportunity for a better life. Indeed, that was touched on in the earlier debate around some of the domestic violence activities of individuals. I hope that the proposers of the motion take the amendment as a supportive supplement.

We cannot pretend that the recurring influence of paramilitaries is not a feature of this society that needs to be overcome. It is a fundamental part of the unfinished business of our peace process. While parties here will disagree on the profile or the provenance of paramilitary gangs or, indeed, on the most appropriate operational response to their threat, it is important that we send a united message to those involved. Whoever you think that your struggle is against, whether it is republicanism or loyalism, apparently, Irish unity or the British state, allegedly: you are wrong.

Every act of violence is a violation of the will of the people of this island, North and South. Your fight is with the people of Ireland, and that is a fight that you will never, ever win.

7.45 pm

It is important that we do not allow our different approaches to this issue, or different emphases on approaches to it, or to the issue of legacy, to be interpreted as division on the core matter. There is no tolerance

for those who set themselves against the direct wishes of our people for peace. As parties, we should have a coherent and consistent shared standard that recognises and rejects paramilitary interests. Our shared approach should be about rooting out paramilitarism in all its forms, not singling out particular groups or parties. A whole-community approach, which the SDLP has long called for, would send a powerful message to those whom we represent and to those who oppose these institutions.

That should present a challenge to us all as Members of the Assembly. It is not enough to issue stale statements of condemnation when there is a security alert in our own constituencies. Recycling the same words and sentiments when it is close to home is just not enough. The truth is that a bomb in Derry or Belfast is as much of a threat to people who live in Mid Ulster, Newry or anywhere else as if it had been placed in one of our towns. We should see every vestige of paramilitary activity as an attack on all of us and respond as one community, united in our commitment to ending the coercive control of those gangs over our society.

It is easy to talk about unity in the House in March, removed from the context of difficult situations. Our commitment to tackling paramilitarism together is more often tested in the white heat of controversy in the summer months. I will not dwell on that, but it is worth saying that when political messages on paramilitarism appear capricious, self-serving or, indeed, divided, it only compounds the working challenges for those who are trying to help communities to transition away from ingrained paramilitary interests. They thrive on division, and it must be our mission to stay close to each other when times are difficult. It must also be said that it would be easier to stay closer on those issues if these institutions were clearly able to allay the misgivings that have previously been expressed that programme money unduly follows paramilitary-related entities or that employment that derives from some community funding is unfairly given to those with proven paramilitary associations.

I will now turn to the terms of the amendment and, specifically, to the additional tools that the PSNI and the courts need to disrupt and dismantle criminal gangs. Members will be aware that the absence of a functioning Executive has led to a lag in the introduction of unexplained wealth orders here. I welcome the Justice Minister's comments that she intends to bring forward the necessary provisions to activate the implementation of those orders. It would be useful if she would — I am sure that she will, later on — outline a timetable for the introduction of the necessary regulations.

It is important for confidence in policing, and in our efforts to tackle paramilitaries and criminal gangs, that people see the relentless pursuit of those who have amassed significant assets as a result of criminality. How many times have Members tried to encourage people to bring information to the police, only to be told that the dogs in the street know who is behind the drug dealing, punishment beatings or racketeering? That is because they live in big houses, drive flash cars and appear invulnerable to the law. Indeed, it is suggested that some of them are agents, and that must be put on record here too.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that those who have significant assets, with no immediate evidence of a means to support that and who are suspected of being implicated

in serious criminal wrongdoing, should have to account for those assets. We cannot pretend that there is no correlation between those who have previously exercised coercive control over communities under the guise of armed struggle and those who now exercise the same form of control for profit. They have not gone away, you know.

It is important that every tool be available to bring those gangs to justice. This must be the beginning of a sustained assault on the infrastructure of criminal control that exists in far too many communities. We must acknowledge that this is not a matter for just the Justice Minister to tackle — I referred earlier to the likes of HMRC — nor will resource alone bring to an end the activities of those who prey on our communities and their insecurities or fears. We need a whole-Executive approach to dealing with the causes of the poverty, deprivation and deep-seated inequalities that exist, particularly in working-class communities.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, in dealing with the past, it is imperative that the legacy mechanisms in the Stormont House Agreement are introduced sooner rather than later because we need the truth — the horrible truth — to be told in full about what was done, and we need all those responsible held to account?

Mr McGlone: Absolutely. It is vital that we have the truth. Without the truth, people will live with that sense of injustice. That, too, can be fed upon and perpetuated by these people, who tend to portray themselves, which is the only way to put it, as defenders of communities and the like. Without that sense of justice permeating society, those people, however misguided they may be, will still see a void to fill.

There is also a requirement to invest in communities that have yet to experience the peace dividend. It means ensuring that we have a regionally balanced economy that provides opportunity for everyone. It means levelling up our ambition for new housing. It means investing in the infrastructure needed to allow towns and cities across the North to flourish.

We should be building a society that provides everyone with the security of a job and the dignity of a home. It is the communities that have been let down the most that are most at risk of paramilitary and criminal control. I therefore ask Members to support our amendment in an effort to deal with the insidious influence of these gangs. We are happy to hear that the Member has agreed to support our amendment.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for Upper Bann, Mr Beattie, for bringing the motion to the Assembly. We will support the motion and the SDLP amendment, which, we think, enhances the motion. Indeed, it reflects one of the amendments that we had wished to table on unexplained wealth orders. To that end, we will support it.

Paramilitarism has been a challenge for decades. It was wrong in the past and it is wrong today to have paramilitary organisations. We need an effective response to that. When I look at how the police engage with paramilitary organisations, I recognise that they have a policy. Their policy outlines that their engagement must be for a clear policing purpose and that subsequent interactions must be necessary, lawful, proportionate and in line with the code of ethics.

An uncomfortable truth that Members need to face up to is that there is engagement with individuals associated with paramilitary organisations. There are also policies in place, whether written or unwritten. We see it when officials from the Housing Executive or other public-sector organisations engage with individuals regarded as community representatives. I suspect that that happens across every constituency, and Members will be able to cite examples of where that takes place. That is an uncomfortable truth that people need to face up to. It is the uncomfortable reality that paramilitary organisations exist, as do the individuals associated with them. That does not make it right. Therefore, there needs to be a response that brings us to the stage where paramilitary organisations no longer exist, and we can see the transition that people have talked about taking place.

I will give way to Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: Does the Member ever think that those organisations might continue to exist in part because of the encouragement that they draw from the House? Where else in the world would you have a security assessment that the structures of the IRA remain in existence, the Provisional army council is still there, the IRA continues to have access to weapons and that the IRA army council oversees the IRA and Sinn Féin? How on earth do we ever defeat paramilitaries by allowing the example to be set, through the institutions of this House, that a paramilitary organisation controls a party of Government?

Mr Speaker: The Member has one extra minute.

Mr Givan: I will come on to the Provisional IRA very quickly, because I notice that my time is going. The Member makes a valid point that we need to know exactly what is going on when it comes to the Provisional IRA. That is why I and colleagues have been raising this issue at the Justice Committee. It was raised with the Justice Minister at Question Time. Where is the assessment? The Garda Commissioner has indicated that he stands over the assessment from 2015. The Chief Constable did not answer on it when he came to the Committee, yet the police have given press releases to different media outlets. We need to know the extent of the criminality that paramilitary organisations are engaged in, because that is the only way to deal with them effectively. That response in 2015 talked about the members of PIRA involved in electioneering, leafleting and other aspects, and that is fine. However, if someone who was engaged in the Shankill bomb, for example, comes to your door, one might ask whether it is really appropriate for that individual to be involved in electioneering. We need a proper and up-to-date assessment, so that people can face up to what the status of PIRA is and what level of criminality PIRA members are involved in. It talked about them being engaged in large-scale smuggling. We need to find out the extent of that, and, therefore, we need an assessment.

I support the amendment. We need unexplained wealth orders, so that people's assets can be seized. Until people see action, they will not have confidence in law enforcement agencies' ability to deal effectively with people who masquerade under the banner of paramilitary organisations and are engaged in criminality. The Chief Constable indicated that he would like the Assets Recovery Agency to be brought back to Northern Ireland. I would like that to be developed to see whether that would become an effective tool in going after and targeting

paramilitary organisations. If it is, it will get our party's support. I also want to see what more the National Crime Agency is doing. It took a lot of work to get the House to support the NCA. People resisted it, and eventually we got there.

Mr Speaker: Could the Member wind up his remarks, please?

Mr Givan: We need everybody to support the forces of law and order, including the National Crime Agency. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an rún. I thank the Members for bringing this important motion for debate. I will speak in favour of the motion and the amendment; I see that that is where all the other parties are at. I should also declare that I am a member of the Policing Board. *[Interruption.]* I am the one speaking here.

The Fresh Start Agreement was published by the Executive and the British and Irish Governments in November 2015. It included commitments to tackle paramilitaries and organised crime. The Executive action plan was published in July 2016 and contained 43 recommendations. The action plan was predicated on the need for a law enforcement response to the criminal gangs and their activities but, importantly, in tandem with a systemic, sustained and collaborative response to tackling the underlying issues of a socio-economic nature that are endemic in the areas in which those gangs mostly operate.

Doug Beattie went through a number of statistics. In 2019, the recorded statistics of paramilitary groups were that there were two deaths from shooting and 18 casualties of shooting. Of those 18 attacks, eight occurred in Derry and Strabane and eight in Belfast. There were also 67 recorded casualties of assault by various organisations. Five of those attacks were on people under the age of 18. There were also 15 bombing incidents and 39 shooting incidents. There were 147 arrests, which resulted in 18 people being charged. I add to that the fact that threats have been made to a number of political representatives. Threats are made against community workers on an ongoing basis and, indeed, wide-ranging threats to Sinn Féin members.

8.00 pm

The Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) was established by both Governments to report annually on progress made, especially on the implementation of the relevant measures from the three Administrations. The IRC's second report was published in November last year, and it outlined the imperative of a:

“sustained, long-term and holistic effort that combines the policing and justice response alongside a major and energetic tackling of the deep socio-economic issues facing the communities where”

these criminal gangs

“operate”.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. In a previous debate and in this one, we have heard, on more than one occasion, about socio-economic deprivation. Does the Member not agree that, ultimately, individuals are individuals, that they choose to engage in criminal activity

and that no excuse can be found lying in a defence of socio-economic deprivation?

Mr Speaker: The Member has one extra minute.

Mr G Kelly: I thank you for that, and I do not necessarily disagree. Of course individuals are responsible for what they do, but you cannot ignore the underlying socio-economic issues in communities. You have to take a holistic view, and if you want to draw people away from criminal activity, you need, as other Members have said, a full-government approach. I will talk about that in a moment.

The issues are complex and are ingrained in the fabric of those communities. We require a new, dedicated outcome in the Programme for Government as the best way of achieving the whole-of-the-system approach that is so essential for the success of the project. A policing and criminal justice response is essential, so I agree with you entirely on that, but, in isolation from an accompanying community empowerment response, it cannot deliver the required outcome that everyone in the House and outside it wants.

The IRC's second report also contained a number of other key recommendations: a greater emphasis to be placed on the correct use of civil recovery powers, and, as has been mentioned a number of times, that would also involve unexplained wealth orders being introduced; and an increased provision of dedicated neighbourhood policing teams, which should be fully resourced. Again, information that tries to deal with that is, at the base of policing, community empowerment and community policing.

Another key recommendation was the introduction of measures to improve the effectiveness of the justice system. Those are aimed at increasing the pace at which the justice system works, with a view to building public confidence and support, especially in communities that have become disengaged from the criminal justice agencies. All those things are connected.

To conclude, if we are really intent on wanting to tackle effectively and degrade seriously those major criminal gangs, the twin-track approach outlined above is essential to achieving our shared objectives. They are not mutually exclusive in any way. I note that the Chief Constable, commenting on the publication of 'New Decade, New Approach', welcomed commitments pertaining to those points. As a member of the Policing Board, I can say that the policing with the community branch is central to there being confidence in policing, and the commitment to increasing neighbourhood teams is fundamental to that. I urge Members to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Muir: I speak on behalf of the Alliance Party and welcome the tabling of the motion, which addresses a key concern for many people across Northern Ireland, especially those living under the grip of criminals who are masquerading as paramilitaries.

Nearly 22 years after the Good Friday Agreement, people are rightly fed up. They want to see the rule of law apply to every part of Northern Ireland and paramilitary organisations gone for good. The process of transitioning towards a culture of lawfulness as part of our post-conflict transformation has been far, far too slow. The reasons for that are many, with an improved statutory response always something that we should explore, but it would be wrong to point the blame at others when, in fact, it is political leaders who share a significant burden of responsibility.

I acknowledge the complexity of our past, but, until we finally declare that all violence in the past, whether by organisations, individuals or the state, was wrong and should never be glorified or excused, we will continue to lend justification to those who seek to legitimise their actions in the present. Whether in 1970 or 2020, all paramilitary activity was and is wrong. If, however, people are willing to transition and committed to transitioning to a new, lawful future that recognises that the only organisation whose writ should run large is the Police Service of Northern Ireland, we must embrace that and assist.

As David Trimble stated:

"Just because someone has a past does not mean they cannot have a future",

but when they are, in fact, still living in the past, and denying others a future as a result of their criminal activities, such as drug dealing, which are done under the cover and veil of illegal paramilitary organisations, the only future that those people should have is in prison.

Tacit or explicit tolerance and endorsement of those people must end. Words must be matched with actions. A Member cannot vote for the motion and then stand side by side with individuals who are known to be still involved in paramilitarism. Failure to stand up to those who are known to be actively involved in paramilitarism, and instead meeting, endorsing and legitimising them, only serves to worsen the situation that is endured by local communities and inhibits statutory bodies to act when elected political representatives send out messages of acceptability. Only the police, courts and rule of law should be given respectability in Northern Ireland in 2020, properly resourced and with all the necessary legislative powers.

Last week, I picked up my local newspaper to read that the number of households who were declared homeless in Ards and North Down because of paramilitary threats has almost doubled since 2016. That is just one of the number of reasons why we must take action. I am, therefore, content to support the motion and amendment but in the knowledge that we can have all the laws and funding, and pass all the motions we like, but to effectively tackle and end paramilitarism, there must be collective effort across the Executive, the Chamber, councils and communities.

Local people are being locked out of opportunities to grow and prosper by paramilitary gatekeepers who control, dominate and exploit them. By working together, addressing the circumstances that are used to recruit people into their criminal empires and adopting a zero-tolerance approach to figures who are actively involved in paramilitarism, we can, together, turn the words that are being expressed here into action. It is important that we do that.

Ms Bunting: I wish to declare my membership of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I thank those who tabled the motion, giving the Assembly a chance to discuss properly the scourge that has blighted our land and communities for decades. It is scandalous that, some 22 years after the Belfast Agreement and all the promises of ceasefires and standing down, paramilitarism continues, albeit in a different guise. Then again, what is a mere lie to those who engage in violent beatings and murder? Let me be clear: it was just as wrong then as it is now, and has been all along on all sides.

Like the parasite that it is, paramilitarism has morphed and mutated to fit its own needs and gain. Long gone are the days when those who engaged in it took the view that they were defending their people — that there was a cause. Now, the only protection the community wants or needs is from those who purport to be their protectors and defenders. The only cause is lifestyle, status, money and drugs. There is no political or religious cause. There is only crime — organised crime, drug dealing, loan-sharking, racketeering, and keeping their own people in line through threats and intimidation. My constituency of East Belfast has seen more than its fair share.

They murder their own because of perceived slights or insults. For hard men, they have very sensitive egos. Just ask the McCartneys and, more recently, the Ogles. I have met both, and I stand with both. There is no justification for people's being chased, beaten and stabbed to death in the street, or on a farm, as in the case of Paul Quinn.

Folks are sick of working themselves into the ground to raise their children and give them a decent life. They are just about making ends meet, while watching people who have seldom, if ever, worked a day in their lives, or who apparently have modest jobs, but live in great houses, with the best of everything, and cars, clothes and holidays that do not reflect their supposed income. Now we see young adults who are owned by organisations, working to pay off drug debts, and, even worse, coming at an arranged time, often driven to the appointed place by a loved one, to be beaten, maimed or shot. It seems as if those gangs do so without fear. I have regularly challenged the PSNI about who runs Northern Ireland. Is it the lawless —?

Mr Catney: Will the Member give way?

Ms Bunting: Pat, if you do not mind, I will keep going. Thank you very much.

Is it the lawless or the lawful? There is no question: the gangmasters and their minions consider themselves to be judge, jury and executioner. The problem is that that view can be reinforced by delays in the justice system. Unquestionably, the slow pace of the system, in a society that demands immediacy, contributes to the context in which there are those who reach the end of their tether and approach the paramilitaries for swift justice in the form of an assault or the threat of one.

Thankfully, we are seeing a change in views. The grip is loosening. Recent DOJ statistics show a 46% decrease in the view that paramilitary assaults are justified in certain circumstances. Moreover, 68% of those living in mainly loyalist areas and 62% of those living in mainly republican areas disagree that paramilitary groups keep the area safe. People are seeing through them. Long may that continue. The communities have had enough; they have found their voice and the strength to say, "Enough". Now it is the responsibility of politicians, the PSNI and the courts to come in behind them with support, investigations, convictions and adequate sentencing. If people are to come forward, often at great risk to their safety and that of their family, they must feel that the support, protection and follow-up will be worth that risk. Otherwise, the fear and coercion will re-establish itself and the information will run dry.

Clearly we are beginning to see some fruit from the Ending the Harm campaign. However, it is imperative that that work is not undermined by statutory agencies and Departments, including, but not limited to, councils, the

PSNI and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Often, as has been stated, the gatekeepers in a community are afforded access to senior officials in those organisations whom the average citizen is not.

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

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Ms Bunting: I will give way.

Mr Givan: Does the Member agree with me that Newry and Mourne council, for example, really should include tackling paramilitarism in its action plan, and that the fact that it has not sends out the wrong message?

Mr Speaker: The Member has one minute extra.

Ms Bunting: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

That is right. All councils should be considering it in their community plans.

The average citizen is not afforded such access. That in turn serves to underscore and legitimise their credibility and standing. That is equally applicable to the Parades Commission. I have raised this matter directly with it: we cannot, on the one hand, expend millions of pounds to reinforce the message that paramilitarism will no longer be tolerated and that our society must move on and desist from the glorification of terror, whilst having that message being entirely undermined annually by the IRA's D company parade in Belfast, which sees participants dressed as active combatants. There is a world of difference between celebrating heritage and history, as we are all entitled to do, and the glorification of a terrorist campaign.

Undoubtedly, there are those who have turned their lives around —

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

Ms Bunting: I will do, Mr Speaker.

— and who now use their influence to show young people that there is a better way. They should be assisted. I welcome the results achieved by the paramilitary crime task force. I urge it to follow the money, and I urge the Minister to bring forward the criminal finances legislation —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Bunting: — to allow those involved to be fully resourced to bring those individuals to justice and —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up. Thank you.

Ms Bunting: — those gangs to an end.

Mr Lynch: As a member of the Policing Board, I support the motion and the amendment. The motion is too narrow in its scope. Tackling serious criminality is not solved by police alone. However, they have an important role to play. These criminal groups and their activities are mostly embedded in communities that also suffer social and economic problems, including poverty, unemployment, educational underachievement, drug and alcohol addiction and poor mental health. The IRC report that was published late last year stated that that will require the twin-track approach that was set out in the first report: a policing

and justice response side by side with a fundamental and sustained tackling of underlying problems in those communities where criminal networks operate. The Chief Constable also confirmed at a recent Policing Board meeting that there is a need for an input from all relevant agencies. The IRC report goes further:

"The comprehensive tackling of"

criminal gangs

"must become an expressly stated and dedicated outcome of the Programme for Government".

8.15 pm

Where the police play an important role is in providing neighbourhood policing and implementing a key theme in the policing plan: policing with the community. That is done by building the relationship between the police and the community. By adopting that approach, the PSNI can demonstrate that they understand the needs and problems of the community. PCSPs play an important role, working with partners and communities so that the PSNI can help to make a positive difference to improve the lives of communities and individuals.

There is evidence to support the benefits of a sustained policing presence in communities in preventing crime and enhancing community safety. People feeling safe and having confidence in policing encourages cooperation with the police in the provision of vital information and the reporting of crime. That is an essential building block in the process of tackling criminal gangs.

If we take the example of Limerick, which was blighted by gangland crime some years back, community policing was particularly successful in building a better relationship between the gardaí and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In a 12-month period, figures showed a marked and continued decline in violent crime. There was also a twin-track approach in Limerick. The chief executive of Limerick County Council coordinated a programme to address the issues of social exclusion in the city. As a result, Limerick is a much safer city today. The twin-track approach is fundamental if tackling organised crime is to be successful.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. I have listened to his comments on talking to the police. I find that interesting, given that he did not come very clean about his actions in 1986. He went to jail, obviously, for his part. Equally or more worrying is a comment in the book that has been published by Mr Kelly, in which Mr Adams says, about telling the truth:

"There may, of course, be omissions in how the story is told. How could it be otherwise? I'm sure Gerry [Kelly] has no wish to go back to prison, or to be responsible for others going there. I certainly wouldn't blame him for that."

If we are going to have a twin-track approach and if we are going to tell the police, when will we have the truth about what everybody was involved in so that those who feed off our society have no justification for looking up to some people as though they were local heroes?

Mr Speaker: The Member has one extra minute.

Mr Lynch: I note the Member's remarks, but I do not agree with them.

There is a need to empower and support communities in resisting and rejecting paramilitary control. Sinn Féin agrees with the Independent Reporting Commission's recommendation, as set out in its most recent report, of a multi-layered approach to tackling serious criminality, including effective criminal justice responses along with community empowerment and a systemic and sustained response to the socio-economic issues experienced in the working-class communities on which the gangs prey.

We totally reject those who continue to engage in criminality, intimidation and control and give full support to the agencies working to close down criminal networks and activities. I call on the Minister of Justice to ensure that the PSNI and other agencies and community responses are supported and properly resourced to allow them to increase their efforts to address ongoing criminality.

I understand that these issues are complex and ingrained in the fabric of communities. They require new, dedicated outcomes in the Programme for Government. That is the best way to achieve success in ending criminality.

Mr Frew: I welcome the motion. As was mentioned earlier, the crime motions that we have before us today tell a tale about Members and how they have their fingers on the pulse of the community.

We have a responsibility in the House, as elected representatives, to be role models and to show society how we can behave, what we should tolerate and what we should not. It is not good enough to justify actions of the past when actions of the same ilk happen today. It is not good enough to say that it was in the past and that it was OK then but is not OK now. It is not in the past. There are victims and survivors who live with this on a daily basis. It is not in the past. It is there day to day. Even if you come out and say that it is not right to bomb up a street, a town or a busload of workers and you condemn that now, does it not undermine your argument and is it not hypocrisy and duplicity when you go the next night to some shindig to celebrate a prison break or tell stories about taking a round in the leg when you were getting chased by the RUC and you managed to nip over the border?

There is an onus on all of us to tell people fairly and squarely that terrorism is wrong. It has always been wrong. It wrought death and destruction on our people. You are not any great saviours of your people; in fact, you hurt your own. There is absolutely no doubt about that. It is not in the past, because it is happening now, and it is challenging the whole House. We have a Finance Minister who just will not say the words, "Paul Quinn was not a criminal". The Finance Minister does not get it. It is not what he said years ago, in 2007, which really did slur the family and hurt them deeply. It is not what he said then; it is what he is not saying now. It echoes and hurts the —.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Member for allowing the intervention. Paramilitarism has left scars on families and communities. Will the Member agree that paramilitarism, criminality, coercive control and intimidation are wrong and always were wrong? Will the Member also agree that there is no place in the House, 22 years after the Good Friday Agreement, for anyone to give cover to blatant paramilitarism and coercive control and, by so doing,

further victimise victims such as Paul Quinn and his family?

Mr Speaker: The Member has one minute extra.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I agree perfectly with that statement. I commend you in the SDLP not only now in the days and hours that we are in this place but for the years when you took the abuse in republican areas and from republican representatives for standing strong and saying that violence was wrong. I commend you for that: violence is wrong.

I will centre on hope — hope for the future. We are all moving on and getting older, but we are seeing a younger generation of politicians. I say to those politicians now, especially those from the party opposite, that there is an issue that undermines the House. Of course, the debate is raging in the Republic of Ireland also, because that party might glimpse a bit of sovereign power, and, of course, that is a dangerous place for the Republic of Ireland to be. I plead with the younger Members of Sinn Féin to take away the shackles of the army council, to remove the coercive control that you are all under from the bogeymen in the shadows and to cut that loose and concentrate on pure politics to make our society better. You have the power, and you have the choice, if you choose to take it. I hope that you do, because no one else can do it but you. It is not right to condemn the actions of others and then say that it was OK in the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. It was not.

To the young members of Sinn Féin I say, “Do not fall for the spin of the glorification of terrorism”. There is no glory at all. There is no glory in being on the run. There is no glory in lying on the concrete floor of a safe house with no company but your conscience after you have done an act of criminality and terrorism. There is no company and no glorification in that. There is no glorification in being an informer and telling your agents all the information you know. It is true that terrorism was beaten in this place. It is true that the security forces strangled terrorism to the point where it could not operate. That is why we got a peace process. We should have known, when, only weeks after the signing of the Belfast Agreement, prisoners got out of prison with clenched fists and “Yo-hos”, what we were going to be in for and the prolonged period of terrorism and criminality that we have had to face ever since. We want to see an end to it. There can be no toleration of it. It must end now.

Mr O’Toole: Initially, I was to speak in favour of the amendment tabled by my party colleagues, but, since we are in the fortunate position of everyone in the House agreeing with the amended motion, I do not have to do too much to convince people. When I wrote my remarks on the motion and our amendment, I naively imagined that it would not evolve quickly into a debate about the past in this place. Of course, in a sense, it is not entirely wrong that people talk about the past because, as we know, the past is intimately related to the present. However, in the spirit of discussing the amended motion, the broad scope of the motion put down by Doug Beattie and others is to be welcomed. The amendment that we have tabled offers a specific analysis of the context in which paramilitarism and criminality continue to thrive in communities across Northern Ireland. It also, as my colleague Patsy McGlone said, details specific additional powers that should be quickly deployed to address this scourge on our society.

I know that the Justice Minister is already thinking about how they can be deployed quickly.

In the last few weeks, we have talked a lot about how these institutions need to win the confidence of people here. We know that we need to manage resources better. We know that we need to deliver public services. We know that we need to focus on real, meaningful change to people’s lives, not just to the lives of those in our particular tribe but to everyone’s lives. If we are serious, we must recognise that too many working-class communities in Northern Ireland are forced to live under the heel of paramilitarism or, more specifically, criminal gangs.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I take him back to the comments of my colleague Ms Bunting about the way in which senior officials — whether it is the Parades Commission, the Housing Executive, the institutions and organs of the state — who engage directly with paramilitaries will never live in the communities that he describes. They will never live in the communities in which those paramilitaries operate. They rub shoulders with them and then get to go home to nice, middle-class communities where they do not have to deal with the behaviour of paramilitaries.

Mr O’Toole: I agree in part with what my constituency colleague said, and I will go on to talk a little about that. He is right, in the sense that working-class communities at the forefront of conflict are not people, to put it bluntly, like all of us, certainly not like me. I confess to being someone who did not live at the forefront of conflict. That is why there is an even greater onus on those of us in the House to deal with the issues that confront working-class communities.

We are 22 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, as several Members mentioned. The Assembly and Executive, sporadic though their functioning has been, are products of that agreement, and our existence is a good thing. However, if we are honest, many of the benefits of the institutions and our imperfect peace have not flowed to the working-class communities that were on the front line of the conflict. Too often, those communities remain under the coercive control of criminal elements who are either explicitly associated with paramilitary groups or are controlled by former members. Other Members, including my colleague Patsy McGlone and Doug Beattie, detailed vividly the activities of those blinged-up brigadiers who go into their community, demand obedience and inflict nothing but misery.

I agree with Doug’s original motion that the PSNI and law enforcement agencies must be resourced, and I welcome the more explicit public backing given recently by other parties in the Assembly to the PSNI recruitment campaign. However, we cannot pretend that ongoing paramilitarism and criminality exist in a vacuum. They are, to use a phrase that used to be familiar in this place, inextricably linked to the vulnerability of communities with high deprivation and low opportunity. Our amendment acknowledges that intersection and offers a more explicit suggestion for hitting the gangs where it hurts: in their pockets. Unexplained wealth orders are already available to the National Crime Agency, but they need to be made available to the Police Service of Northern Ireland as a matter of urgency.

8.30 pm

Paramilitary violence was always wrong. It always inflicted the greatest harm on the poorest and most vulnerable communities. That is still the case today. The glorification of violence is a problem and is wrong. We are nearly five years on from the Fresh Start Agreement, which pledged to end paramilitarism. Of course, we had the action plan, which came out a year later, and several other Members have detailed that and how it has been stalled by the absence of these institutions. We are one year on from the appalling murders of Ian Ogle in east Belfast and Lyra McKee in Derry.

Mr Catney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that paramilitaries still control communities through fear and exploitation? That is evidenced by the fact that, over the past year, the numbers of paramilitary shootings are up by 46%, paramilitary assaults are up by 9% and bombings are up by 12%. Meanwhile, arrests are down by 22%. Does the Member agree that strategies are failing and that three years of stagnation has not helped matters and has allowed paramilitaries to gain a stronger foothold in society?

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much. I will conclude my comments at that.

Mr Speaker: I call Andy Allen, and I thank the Member for agreeing to take the final two minutes.

Mr Allen: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As you outlined, I have only two minutes, so I will attempt to keep my comments concise and to the point.

As we heard from Members across the Chamber, individuals are masquerading as paramilitaries. They portray themselves as defenders of communities and as heroes, but that could not be further from the truth. They are nothing but cowards. They are criminals. They prey on the most vulnerable in society to create lucrative criminal empires that put profit in their pockets. As communities and political leaders, we must do more, and, collectively, we can do more. We can educate our communities not to support these criminal individuals by purchasing their knocked-off goods and advise them to turn their backs on the drug dealers and those who rule communities through fear.

I would like to quickly point to the murder, in my constituency, of Mr Ogle, which was mentioned by my friend, a Member for East Belfast, Ms Bunting. He was a family man and an east Belfast man through and through, and he was savagely and barbarically beaten and stabbed to death by individuals who portray themselves as protectors of our community. They left a man dying and bleeding, with his life ebbing away while they ran into the dark. Are those defenders of our community? Certainly not. I served in Afghanistan, where real men have gone. Those individuals are not real men; they are cowards. They prey on the vulnerable in our communities.

I would also point quickly to restorative justice. I have seen it in action, and it can help some of our vulnerable young people to move away from the clutches of paramilitary gangs. It can help them to move away from those brigadiers that my colleague Doug Beattie mentioned, who send out those young, vulnerable foot soldiers to do their bidding, while they profit from the misery of others. We can and must do more. Our actions need to speak louder than

our words. It is OK. Across the Chamber, we can easily condemn bombings and shootings and highlight statistics, but behind those statistics are families, individuals and people who have had their lives ruined.

I pay tribute to the Ogle family, who have stood head and shoulders above the criminals. We need to support them in the days ahead. I call on the Justice Minister to review our bail system and to look at how we can tighten that up, because individuals are being released, and in our malign society, we see paramilitaries being able to come out and intimidate families and witnesses.

Mr Speaker: I call on the Justice Minister to respond. The Minister has 15 minutes.

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Members who tabled the motion and amendment and allowed us to have a debate about something hugely important.

Paramilitary groups continue to exploit communities in Northern Ireland and to harm people through their criminality and coercive control. They destroy lives and hurt the people whom they so often claim to represent. It is right that we discuss the issues together and how we can make our community a safer and better place.

It is over 20 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, yet, unfortunately, despite the passage of time and the progress that we have seen made during the intervening years, paramilitary groups remain active and involved in activities that inflict serious harm. The brutal reality is that that includes murder. Andy Allen, Joanne Bunting and Doug Beattie raised two paramilitary-related murders in my constituency: that of Robert McCartney and that of Ian Ogle. The two families lived just yards apart. They both lost a loved one and, after that, continued to suffer victimisation at the hands of those responsible. I have met members of both families and will be meeting the Ogle family again later this month. I want to hear their concerns and respond to them if I can. I also met the family of Paul Quinn, whose pain on the loss of their son has been compounded by the smear attached to his name. I take this opportunity to call on anyone who has any information on any of those murders, or on the other paramilitary murders that have happened in our community, to cooperate with the police and bring those responsible to justice.

Sadly, another constituent of mine was named in this debate. I will reference just briefly the murder of Adrian Ismay. I will also mention David Black, after the targeting of prison officers from within prison was mentioned by Robbie Butler. That was raised in the context of the separated regime that exists in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. I assure Members that the Prison Service remains committed to finding ways in which to address what are very challenging issues associated with the operation of the separated regime. It remains committed to keeping people safe, both within and outside the prison, not least prison officers, who are on the front line.

Paramilitary activity in our community involves beatings, attacks meted out to vulnerable members of the community, drug dealing, intimidation and racketeering. More often than not, the activity is driven by sheer greed, with disdain for the safety and welfare of the public, as Andy Allen rightly noted. We must not normalise it as an accepted part of Northern Ireland life. Paramilitarism

is about making money by controlling and exploiting communities, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The law enforcement response led by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the laws, policies and processes relating to the criminal justice system supported by my Department are clearly an important part of the response.

Equally, to view paramilitarism as an issue to be addressed solely through a law enforcement response is to take a narrow approach and one that is unlikely to address all the issues effectively. Paramilitarism is a legacy of our troubled past in Northern Ireland, and there are many interlinking and systemic factors that need to be addressed so that, collectively, we can enjoy a society free of paramilitaries, their structures and their influence. That is a complex task, and it means facing up to hitherto divisive and difficult issues on a collaborative basis. It requires not just a strategy but political leadership in the Chamber and in local communities. As Members will know, the work has already begun through the Executive action plan, 'Tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime'. The plan was the Executive's response to the Fresh Start Agreement and to 38 separate recommendations made by an independent panel. Although the work was coordinated by a team in my Department, it is a cross-Executive effort to address both the harm caused by paramilitarism and the underlying issues that make individuals and communities vulnerable to their influence.

Activities under the action plan are delivered using four mutually reinforcing approaches: long-term prevention; building capacity to support transition; building confidence in the justice system; and strategies and powers to tackle criminality. I will touch on each briefly. Delivery partners are drawn not only from Departments but from a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations, because it is by working together on that basis that we can make an impact.

I turn first to long-term prevention. That is aimed at creating a society in which paramilitarism has no place, and it involves supporting vulnerable people, particularly our young people, who are at risk of harm from paramilitarism and criminality. It is delivered through intensive mentoring and support, boosting the integration and rehabilitation of people with convictions, promoting public awareness and resistance to issues such as so-called paramilitary-style attacks, and empowering teachers and youth workers to support young people who may be most vulnerable to coercive control. A very positive example of work focused on steering individuals away from harm is the Probation Board-led Aspire project, which delivers interventions for young men aged 16 to 30 who are marginalised in communities and at risk of becoming involved in criminality and paramilitarism.

It is delivered in partnership with a range of organisations, such as NIACRO, Barnardo's and accredited restorative justice organisations. Peer mentoring, with targeted support for employment, training, housing, health and social services, is involved.

An initial evaluation of findings demonstrated the positive impact that it has not only on the young men themselves but on their families and communities. Similarly, the START programme run by the Department of Education and the Education Authority with community work organisations provides intensive support to young people who are at risk of involvement with or harm from paramilitary activity. It has

had a significant impact on the lives of young people who might otherwise have been drawn into serious offending by paramilitaries who seek to exploit them. Those examples and the long-term-prevention approach more generally highlight the importance of addressing the varied factors that affect an individual's vulnerability to paramilitarism and organised crime, which was referenced by Gerry Kelly and others in their contributions. It is about improving educational attainment and employability, ensuring that mental health support is available, addressing issues around alcohol and substance abuse and working together better in early intervention, tailoring support to individual needs. The nature of the challenge is such that we have to work together across the Executive if we are to meet our ambitions.

The second approach is about building capacity to support transition. We need to develop capacity among individuals in communities and our society as a whole to resist paramilitary influence. Delivery in this area includes the role of women in community development, creating opportunities for children and young people and better aligning our efforts in places impacted by paramilitary control. The Department for Communities and other community partners, for example, lead on the Women Involved in Community Transformation (WICT) programme by supporting women to improve their skills in areas such as leadership, mentoring, peace building and personal development. The Executive Office also delivers a broad range of projects designed to build community capacity as part of its Communities in Transition work.

It is important that, collectively, we take a more coherent, consistent and holistic approach to tackling paramilitarism by enhancing community resilience and providing the space in which new voices can be heard. Paul Givan, in particular, raised the issue of the police and other statutory agencies who are required, in certain circumstances, to engage with people in the community who set themselves up as gatekeepers. Whilst we recognise that people who have former paramilitary links are members of the community and have a right to express their opinions, it should be on the same basis as everyone else. It is important that we do not reinforce that status of gatekeeper for those who have coercive control over communities, and we should be mindful that engaging with them can send out negative messages to those who would otherwise want to help the police by providing information and cooperating with their inquiries into paramilitarism. Political leadership is necessary to invoke change and enable us to engage with communities in a way that bypasses those gatekeepers. The aim is not to exclude them from having their view heard but to ensure that they do not control who else can be heard. I welcome the strong statement to that effect by Andrew Muir, in particular, on that issue.

There are two other thematic approaches under the Executive action plan relating to the criminal justice sphere, one of which is building confidence in the justice system. We know that the pace of justice can impact on victims and witnesses who have been affected by paramilitary or criminal activity. It can affect communities who, understandably, want to see paramilitary offenders dealt with speedily by the courts. Central to that approach is work by my Department to speed up the justice system, and part of that will be through the reform of committal proceedings. It is a legislative priority for me, and I trust

that Members will wholeheartedly support it when it is put before the Assembly later this year.

Other partners such as policing and community safety partnerships and community planning partnerships actively integrate concepts around lawfulness and confidence in the rule of law into their daily outputs. Paul Frew and Matthew O'Toole, as well as others, rightly said that historic narratives could have a crucial role on those engaged in or vulnerable to becoming engaged in paramilitarism today, and we should not let the past cast a shadow over the current and future arrangements. This provides a solid basis by working through those community organisations, to have a better understanding of how paramilitarism affects communities and to help inform our long-term responses.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Long: I want to get through this, and I am quite short for time.

The final thematic approach is about strategies and powers to tackle criminal activity. The key delivery partner here is the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF), which was set up in 2016 as a dedicated investigative capacity to tackle all forms of criminality linked to paramilitarism. Along with the PSNI, the National Crime Agency and HM Revenue and Customs, it has proven to be a valuable additional capacity and has delivered a number of operational successes over the years. In tandem, bespoke organised crime legislation is being developed as a means of enhancing the existing framework that criminal justice partners can draw on in seeking to bring offenders to justice. There are other important multi-agency collaboration structures in place to help tackle serious organised crime, including that related to paramilitarism.

8.45 pm

The Organised Crime Task Force, for example, which is coordinated by my Department, provides a forum for strategic leadership in response to organised crime, bringing together key law enforcement partners as well as providing a forum for engagement with other Departments, statutory agencies and a number of expert-led groups. A joint agency task force provides an important mechanism for law enforcement to work in partnership with their counterparts in Ireland to tackle criminality on both sides of the border.

Patsy McGlone and others referenced the issue of introducing unexplained wealth orders and the commencement of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 here. The commencement of those new asset recovery powers is a priority for me. I want to see legislative consent for the 2017 Act achieved before the summer and full commencement of the powers before the end of this year. I want to ensure that the unexplained wealth order powers, and other powers under the 2017 Act, are available to the relevant enforcement agencies, so we are going to take forward the work to ensure that we can achieve the legislative consent of the Assembly as a matter of priority. Those measures, along with others already available under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, are important. They hit the criminals where it hurts: in their pockets. More than that, they help send a powerful message, particularly to those who may be vulnerable, that crime will not pay.

That in turn helps reinforce community confidence in the justice system.

I am already reviewing specific powers to tackle organised crime in Northern Ireland. That was another action under the action plan for tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. Unlike in other jurisdictions, there is no explicit legislation in Northern Ireland to tackle serious and organised crime. We have therefore reviewed several legislative models and worked with law enforcement to develop draft proposals for Northern Ireland. They include offences of participating in and directing organised crime, as well as aggravated offences.

Today calls for the proper resourcing of the PSNI and other agencies to address paramilitarism. Other Members — I think Seán Lynch in particular — also emphasised the importance of community-based policing. The action plan has provided additional funding to a wide range of bodies, including the PSNI, and the nature of the funding reflects the complexities of the issues at hand. However, the current funding period for that action plan finishes in March 2021, so I hope that I have Members' support as I go to my Executive colleagues for continued funding.

As I have outlined, paramilitary influence is still a feature of day-to-day life here for some communities. That is not acceptable. We have to continue to challenge attempts by paramilitary groups to control people and communities and recruit into their ranks. We have to provide better prospects for young people who feel as if there are no alternatives. We must take every opportunity to develop individual, community and societal resistance to paramilitary influence and criminal harm, and we have to be open to new ideas and approaches about how we can develop the action plan. We also cannot shy away from the fact that it needs to be underpinned by a fundamental positive shift in areas such as good relations and continuing to work against sectarianism. Clearly, this must remain a shared task across the Executive and Assembly.

In conclusion, I support the motion and the amendment. In doing so, I reiterate the need to continue to work on a collective, cross-Executive basis as a priority in our Programme for Government to tackle the wider issues so that we can reach a point where paramilitarism and its structures are confined to a very dark chapter in our history books.

Mr Carroll: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is plainly in contravention of the most basic elements of democratic debate to have a discussion like this and not call a single Member from a non-Executive party. What does the Executive have to hide when it comes to paramilitarism?

Mr Speaker: I do not understand your question, because the Executive do not determine the time that the Assembly meets and discusses any business. The Business Committee, which represents most of the parties, sets the time for these debates, not the Executive or anybody else. Nobody is being excluded from debate here.

I call Dolores Kelly to make a winding-up speech on the amendment. She has five minutes.

Mrs D Kelly: I acknowledge the cross-party support for the amendment and the motion and thank the Members who took part in the debate. I particularly want to acknowledge the presence of the Ogle family in the Public Gallery, and the bravery of many families who have stood against

paramilitarism: those of Paul Quinn, in particular, and Robert McCartney and Lyra McKee. What we see is the coercive control and silence — the omertà — that prevents witnesses from coming forward. It is never too late to come forward. I ask anyone who still has information to give it to the police to help them with their investigations and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The motion, the amendment and, indeed, the Justice Minister's response demonstrate the need for a collaborative approach and for political leadership. Many commentators and participants in the debate acknowledged that we as an Executive and an Assembly have a crucial role to play in supporting those who suffer the most and who have been left behind. Twenty-two years on from the Good Friday Agreement, people are still suffering from the violence, extortion, blackmail, drug dealing and criminality of those who call themselves paramilitaries.

Many Members acknowledged the difficulty that the separated prison regime causes and the messages that it can send out. I note that the Justice Minister said that she is doing some work on that. I acknowledge the additional cost of such a regime to the prison and the public purse of, I think, some £3 million or £4 million annually, which has not been funded by the Treasury. No doubt, the Finance Minister might take that up in his deliberations with the Treasury over the coming days and weeks.

Unexplained wealth orders would go a long way in providing confidence to communities and to people who want to step forward. It is not enough today to just have unexplained wealth orders. We also need to look at the financial resources available to other paramilitary combatants in the past, at the affront to democracy across this island that we do not go after criminality and organised crime gangs right across society and at all those who have benefited, both today and in the past, from large-scale smuggling, waste management crimes and all those systems, as Andrew Muir so eloquently put it, that the British Government in particular turned a blind eye to.

Most, but not all, Members recognised the importance that former paramilitaries can play in transitioning. Andrew Muir also mentioned David Trimble's quote:

"Just because someone has a past does not mean they cannot have a future".

We all want to work towards enabling those people, who, as Christopher Stalford said, made a decision to engage in acts of violence, to transition, but environmental and other factors played a role in their getting involved, not least poverty and deprivation. Therefore, it is important that we help people across the community to make the shift from violence to being a positive influence in our communities.

Other Members talked about the Assets Recovery Agency. A challenge was laid down that it should be reinstated in Northern Ireland. I do not think that we would be opposed to that. We all know that over 40 criminal gangs are operating in Northern Ireland alone. The establishment of the NCA in Northern Ireland was the right thing to do, and the SDLP, in particular, played a key role in providing its code of ethics and accountability mechanisms to the Policing Board. At this point, I acknowledge that I am a member of the Policing Board. We played a key role in establishing the NCA here, but we worry that its resources

are spent going after the larger international criminal gangs and that it does not have sufficient focus here in Northern Ireland. That is why the Assets Recovery Agency played such a critical role.

I thank Mr Frew in particular for his acknowledgement of the SDLP's consistent opposition to violence, both in the past and today.

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

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I have 10 seconds.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time will be up.

Mrs D Kelly: Yes. I acknowledge the positive contributions, and I hope that today shows that we are giving political leadership in the challenge to tackle paramilitarism in all its forms.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank all the contributors and caution that I am unlikely to give way as I do not think that 10 minutes will be sufficient for my comments.

I want to begin with the terminology, because we are all being very polite calling these groups "paramilitaries". That is the way that they are organised, but it is not their intent or their purpose. Their intent is terrorism. To prove it, let us look at the Terrorism Act 2000, which states:

"terrorism' means the use or threat of action where ... the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public".

I think that describes admirably all the groups that Doug Beattie listed when he opened the debate.

Terrorism is an absolute, as in it is absolutely wrong, and if, as some Members have done, you stray by saying that it is justified by the circumstances, you create a problem, because you may say, "Well, the circumstances have changed, so terrorism is no longer justified", but others do not. Others say, "Oh no, the circumstances still justify", and that is when groups like the New IRA murder people like Lyra McKee.

I am very glad to hear support for the idea that terrorism is an absolute, from people like Andrew Muir of Alliance, Matthew O'Toole of the SDLP and Paul Frew of the DUP. Paul went on, of course, to remind us that the IRA hurt its own, by tarring and feathering, kneecapping and taking coercive control of its community. That is not something that we hear very often from the Benches opposite, although in the 'Shared Ireland' podcast that I did with Linda Dillon, I was glad to hear her acknowledge the hurt and the legacy in her community that the IRA created.

This is not an attack by me on the IRA. Newtownards is the main town in my constituency, and we have every shade of unionist terror group, including the south Antrim UDA. What is it doing at the top of the Ards peninsula? Mr Muir made clear the impact of this, as the number of people that have been intimidated out of their homes in recent years has doubled because of those groups.

In moving the motion, Doug Beattie gave us a list of the terror groups, the attacks and the assault weapons. He reminded us that these days it is all about extortion, coercion, drug dealing and community control, and he

gave the example of the murder of Ian Ogle. Of course, he also, rightly, reminded us that the House rejected his plea to change the segregated prison regime, leading to the ridiculous situation where a criminal goes in convicted of criminality only to assume the role of a brigadier of a terrorist organisation.

In moving the amendment, Patsy McGlone focused on unexplained wealth orders and the cracking down on what he called "Mr Bling". He reminded me of a friend who is a BBC producer who took his wife for a meal one night, and in came a very well-known loyalist "brigadier" with his entourage and sat at the next table. My friend got quite excited because he thought, "This guy has no idea who I am. I am a behind-the-scenes, faceless producer; perhaps I am going to learn a lot about this organisation". He did learn a lot, because they spoke very freely, comparing the local gymnasias, talking about the best holiday destinations and where to buy the best men's clothing. That was their motivation for being in their paramilitary or terrorist grouping.

There was an intervention from Dolores Kelly about the need to establish the truth from the past. But I remind her that, perhaps, the primary source of wisdom on that was the Consultative Group on the Past, the Eames/Bradley group, which stopped talking about truth recovery and said, "No, we have to talk about information recovery". If we have a body like the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, we must be aware that the terror groups are less likely to tell the real truth of what happened to people's loved ones and much more likely to tell you what they want you to think. They are responsible for some of the grossest human rights abuses, and they are embarrassed, and they will want to rewrite history to try to write those human rights abuses out of memory.

Gerry Kelly focused on socio-economic deprivation, and I do not disagree with him, but I have to say this to somebody like Mr Kelly: if you supported the IRA, you cannot blame others for socio-economic deprivation without acknowledging the deliberate economic carnage that the IRA inflicted with its bombing campaigns over three decades.

Joanne Bunting talked about the scandal of paramilitarism continuing 22 years on from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. I could say to her, "Yes, and 26 years on from the ceasefires". She underlined Patsy McGlone's analysis that people's motivation to be in those groups is for their personal lifestyle.

She gave us statistics for the number of people living in such communities who say, "We no longer want those groups — the paramilitary, terrorist organisations — to do what they claim they're doing, which is to keep us safe. Those days have gone."

9.00 pm

Hansard may prove me wrong, but I tried to listen to Seán Lynch very carefully, and I believe that he used the terms "crime", "criminal" or "criminality" no fewer than 15 times. I say to him that these things are absolute: if it is criminality today, it was criminality in the 1970s, it was criminality in the 1980s and it was criminality in the 1990s.

Matthew O'Toole, making, I think, his first contribution on the issue since joining us in the House, declined the opportunity to discuss and dwell on the past; rather, he focused on the inextricable link between socio-economic

deprivation and the suffering of communities at the hands of these groups.

Andy Allen, in a short but passionate contribution, talked about the need to educate the community. There is always a temptation that the paramilitaries offer a bargain. Do we not all like a bargain? However, they are not bargains. People are being sucked in to promoting and helping to establish, fulfil and fuel these terrorist organisations. I admire Andy because, as he said, he served in Afghanistan, where he almost made the ultimate sacrifice. For him to call those people cowards has a moral authority that I could never deliver.

The Minister, Naomi Long, talked about the need for a systemic approach to tackling the issues. She spoke of the need not just for a strategy but for political leadership: I agree with her. She dwelt at length on the Executive's action plan and its four strands. I listened carefully to the Minister, but I have to say — I do so with respect — that all I heard was about the inputs of government. There was nothing about the impact, and there were no outcomes. I suggest to the Minister that the victims — the people who are under the coercion of the paramilitary organised terror groups — are interested only in outcomes, not in the structures, strategies or systemic approaches. They want to see action that leads to outcomes that get these people off their backs.

I thank all the contributors. It has been a mature debate. We have discussed the issues in some depth. I thank Members. I thank my colleagues for tabling the motion. I thank the SDLP for the amendment, which absolutely adds value, and I am happy to support it. There is, however, another group whom we should be hearing from tonight. The people we should really listen to are in the Public Gallery. We should listen to the Ogles and hear what they have to say. I look forward, after the debate, to listening to them sharing their views on what, they think, has been achieved in the past hour and a half.

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

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that many communities across Northern Ireland are still living under siege from paramilitary gangs; reiterates its total rejection of those who continue to engage in criminality, intimidation and coercive control; gives its full support to the agencies working to close down criminal networks and activity; acknowledges that paramilitarism is being used as a cover for profiteering criminal gangs; further recognises that addressing the pervasive influences of poverty, deprivation and lack of opportunity in working-class communities across Northern Ireland is critical to releasing the grip of criminals; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce unexplained wealth orders to allow the PSNI to disrupt and dismantle these gangs and to work with her Executive colleagues to fully resource the PSNI and other agencies to eradicate the influence of paramilitarism.

Adjourned at 9.04 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 March 2020

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call on the Minister of Finance, Mr Conor Murphy, to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance).]

Mr Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at Final Stage. Further Consideration Stage is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Crime and Older People

Mr Storey: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister of Justice to develop a departmental and cross-agency plan to implement the recommendations of the May 2019 report of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland entitled 'Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland'.

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

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister of Justice for being in the House this morning. We, as individuals and parties, can all unite around the inspirational contribution of older people living and working across Northern Ireland. Whether it is volunteering, caring, employment or childcare, the roles played by this constituent group are essential to the functioning of our society. Therefore, we, as elected representatives, have a responsibility to give older people the confidence and capacity to live enjoyable, enriched and independent lives. However, the first step must be to secure their safety in the community in which they live and in their homes. This will be even more crucial in the coming years as people continue to live longer.

Over 430,000 older people live in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency projected that, by 2041, almost one in four people living in the UK will be over 65. Of course, some of us are heading towards that age group; maybe I should have declared an interest before speaking.

We therefore need dedicated action to place the needs of older people at the heart of crime prevention and crime response in Northern Ireland. It is about future-proofing our crime strategy to protect the most vulnerable.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports that almost 50% of over-75s live with a disability, whilst the Department for Communities estimates that around 15% of people aged over 65 in Northern Ireland live in relative poverty. Although today's motion deals primarily with the law-and-order response to crime against older people, a cross-departmental approach is needed to address the underlying risks to our ageing population in the future. That follows on from some of the comments that were

made in the House last night. Members expressed a concern that the criminal justice element can sometimes be overemphasised. You cannot be exclusive: it has to be a combination of both law and order and criminal justice rather than either/or.

We want to focus on how we can take that cross-departmental approach, and that means that we have to face up to the stark reality of the crimes that are being committed against older people. I declare an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. The figures released by the Police Service of Northern Ireland show that, in 2018-19, 6% of crime victims were aged over 65; there were 14 victims aged over 65 per 1,000 of the population; and 80% of crimes recorded against older people related to theft and criminal damage, while 16% related to violence against the person. No one can begin to imagine the horrendous outcome for our older people when they are attacked in such a vicious and cowardly way.

There are gaps in dealing with the issue. Taken at face value, the figures may not seem to be that high, but the interpretation loses sight of several key factors. First, the rate of crime against older people in Northern Ireland has remained consistent in the past decade, despite a reduction in traditional forms of crime. Secondly, outcome rates for crimes against older persons lag roughly 2% behind outcome rates for crimes against other age groups. That is despite evidence that specific crime-rate targets for the elderly, which are not currently used, have led to a narrowing of the gap from previous years. Thirdly, local fraud and cybercrime statistics reported by Action Fraud, the national fraud and cybercrime reporting centre, are not broken down by age of complainant. There is therefore a significant gap in the analysis of the threat posed to older people by that form of crime. Fourthly, the devil may well be in the detail that is not available. There may be under-reporting owing to a lack of dedicated support for collecting evidence from vulnerable older people, barriers to witness testimony and other pressures caused by the criminal justice system.

Ultimately, the Commissioner for Older People's recommendations are themes that are reflected clearly in the 24 crime and justice recommendations set out in the Commissioner for Older People's May 2019 report, 'The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland'. The recommendations range from the reintroduction of specific crime-rate targets and a review of existing court infrastructure to the creation of specific older people policy guidance for those working in the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). We in the House, including the Minister of Justice, should have no hesitation in endorsing them in full and, I trust, without delay.

In closing, I say that that would be only the first step.

Mr McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr McCann: It is always interesting to note, when we get into this debate about older people in our community and the difficulties that they have, that there are tested and tried organisations — the likes of Good Morning West Belfast, Good Morning Colin and others — many of which are underfunded, that provide an excellent service to ensure that older people in our communities have some sort of contact on a daily basis. Maybe, in tying in the

whole crime thing that you are talking about, that is one of the ways of doing that and making life not only better but safer for older people that we need to look at. Do you agree?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member, and I appreciate his long involvement in his constituency in relation to knowing what his constituents' needs are. In a city setting, those particular needs are more acute. I am not saying that that is exclusively the case, because, obviously, when you move into rural areas, you have other needs, pressures and issues. He is absolutely right. That brings us back to the motive and drive of the motion, which is about us collectively trying to see how we can ensure that we make life better for our older people. I pay tribute to many of those organisations.

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that, although the statistics for a crime against an older person record the one or two people who may be involved, where older persons are living in a community, a tsunami wave of fear runs across that community and creates many more victims than those who have been directly affected by the criminal act?

Mr Storey: I thank my colleague for making that important intervention and observation. It is not just about the individual. While that has to be at the centre of what we do, it is also about the sense of fear that then permeates the community. Again, it comes back to Mr McCann's comments that there are many other organisations there to help, to support and to give advice and reassurance to our older people.

That is why we should be innovative and outward-looking in our approach to solutions. In September 2018, the all-party parliamentary group on financial crime and scamming launched an inquiry into the impact of fraud and scams on vulnerable people. It is recommended that the Government build on the success of projects like the call-blocking pilot for people with dementia to address the vulnerability of older people to scammers. That is just one example, and it is in line with what my colleague Mr McCann said about the types of the initiatives that we can have here in Northern Ireland, and those initiatives ought to be explored.

In conclusion, we should be ambitious and flexible in the protections that we afford to our older generation. Crime against older people is abhorrent, and those responsible should be held to account and put where they rightly belong: behind bars. This motion and the recommendations that it endorses can help to give older victims the confidence, capacity and procedural support to make that possible. I therefore commend the motion.

Mr Speaker: I call Liz Kimmins. As this is Ms Kimmins's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption, unless, of course, the Member makes controversial remarks and invites provocation, which I know you will not do.

Ms Kimmins: It is my honour to stand here today as a representative for the Newry and Armagh constituency. I am a very proud Newry woman. The city is a microcosm of the island of Ireland, with its unique location between Dublin and Belfast, in the valley surrounded by the beautiful Mountains of Mourne and the Ring of Gullion, and is controversially divided between the counties of Armagh

and Down. Of course, I am an Armagh supporter. Newry is a city of very proud people. Growing up in Barcroft Park, in the heart of Ballybot, taught me the importance of community. I am therefore very privileged to be here today representing that community and its interests at a time when our political landscape has changed forever.

I want to pay particular tribute to my predecessor and good friend, Megan Fearon, who was an excellent representative for Sinn Féin and for Newry and Armagh over the last eight years.

Megan was a strong advocate for equality and rights and for her beloved south Armagh. She has been a role model to many and will be badly missed in elected politics locally and nationally. I hope that I can continue to build on her hard work.

10.45 am

I am delighted to speak in favour of the motion and thank the Members for tabling it. I am passionate about the topic following many years of working with older people in the community. It is important to note that this is not about making an assumption that all older people are weak or vulnerable; instead, it is about recognising that increasing vulnerability can come with age. A significant number of older people have disabilities and mental and verbal limitations that can increase their vulnerability and make it more difficult for them to seek help and protection. Crimes against older people can also have a more significant impact than they would on younger people for various reasons. Older people are less able to recover from crime, physically and mentally, and studies show that victims of crime are 2-4 times more likely to enter residential care in the two years following the incident. Many older people hope that that will never happen to them as they wish to live at home for as long as they can.

We have an ageing population in the North, and it is therefore essential that the delivery of services is able to keep up with the pace of that growth. A number of aspects of crime impact on older people and vulnerable people. Fear of crime, as the Member mentioned, can almost be worse than the crime itself, causing increased anxiety among older people, leading to increased social isolation and the onset of illness. Many older people live alone, and their main social interaction depends on others coming into their home to provide the support and assistance that they need. In my experience, the perpetrators of crimes can, on many occasions, be those in a position of trust — be it a carer, a family member or a close friend — who have an opportunity to abuse their position. It is also essential, therefore, that, in implementing the recommendations, we consider how we can reduce the possibility of abuse in those situations by avoiding isolation and dependency on others.

As raised by my colleague Mr McCann, we need to support the invaluable services in communities. In my constituency, we have the Good Morning/Good Neighbour scheme, the Home Secured project and many other community initiatives that are invaluable to older people. It is important that we ensure that they receive sufficient funding and are able to develop their good work.

As well as that, in my council area, the Newry, Mourne and Down PCSP has done significant work on the fear of crime and crime prevention in response to a recent spate

of burglaries, providing home safety packs and Beat the Burglar kits to older people, holding crime prevention events and information sessions in local community centres and town centre locations. There has been a huge uptake of those events because of the significant rise in crime. That work needs to be further developed and rolled out across the North if we are serious about reducing the fear of crime and building the confidence of older people and helping them to feel safer in their own home.

Older people typically face many more challenges to accessing justice than younger people, and the report's recommendations highlight those. PSNI statistics between 2008 and 2018 have consistently shown lower outcome rates for older people who are victims of crime. That can be for a number of reasons, including a reluctance to report to the PSNI due to a lack of confidence in the system and, possibly, experiences of reporting crime that did not have good outcomes. It could be down to a fear of repercussions. As I mentioned, that can be particularly pertinent where the perpetrator is known to the older person, be they someone who comes regularly to their home, a family member or a close friend. There may, for example, be financial abuse.

As the Member said, there is a lot of under-reporting, and it is important that we do all that we can to encourage people to feel safe and confident enough to report crimes to the right authorities. Many cases see no real outcome, which can decrease confidence in the system. It is, therefore, important that we agree to instruct the Policing Board, of which I am a member —

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

Ms Kimmins: — to reintroduce specific outcome rate targets, which will help to improve outcomes, especially for older people, and enhance the transparency and effectiveness of the justice system.

In recent times, we have also seen a high number of scamming incidents in which older people have been specifically targeted. In those cases, many older people can often feel embarrassed, which can make them more reluctant to report to the police.

Mr Speaker: The Member needs to wind up her remarks, please.

Ms Kimmins: OK. In addition to those factors, as was mentioned, a significant number of older people have disabilities, including physical, mental and communication difficulties and sensory issues, all of which can make it difficult to access justice.

Ms S Bradley: First, I welcome the opportunity to support the motion, and I commend Mervyn Storey and Joanne Bunting for tabling it.

At the outset, I reassure any older people who are listening in that, following a spate of burglaries in 2011, which we were all aware of, the rate of recorded burglaries against those aged 60 and over has dropped significantly — by 28%. There has been, however, a negative legacy of those earlier incidents, and that has remained with many people. As has rightly been pointed out, people now live as victims of the fear of crime as opposed to actual crime. The consequential loneliness that emerges from this issue should not be forgotten; it is a real blight on society.

I congratulate the Commissioner for Older People on the thorough 2019 report, which is referred to in the motion. Of course, the report focuses on the views of older persons and looks at the matter purely from their perspective, but, on inspection, the recommendations proposed and the safeguards could apply to many vulnerable people in our society, regardless of their age. I am thinking more of people with learning disabilities or physical disabilities and children. In that same vein, the Department's sentencing review of 2019 correctly stated:

"Before considering options for change the Review considers it important to clarify the category or categories of victims requiring extra protection. The debate to date has focussed" —

rightly —

"on older people, but this excludes other vulnerable people and it has proved difficult to define what is meant by 'older people'."

I know many sprightly over-somethings who would take great offence at being called "old" or even "vulnerable".

The 2019 report by the Commissioner for Older People rightly highlights the barriers to justice, which, arguably, apply more to older people and vulnerable members of our society. They have been touched on today. They include reluctance to give evidence in court; the fact that the offender may be known to the victim or that they are conscious that the offender knows where they live; delay in realising that a crime has happened, which is particularly true with scamming or financial abuse; or the embarrassment of the victim about reporting it. There is also a real impediment in the time it takes to progress through the justice process. It is very consuming at what should be a precious time in somebody's life. No doubt, there is a need for a review of the court infrastructure to better facilitate the needs of vulnerable older people and vulnerable groups across society.

When we hear reports of violence against an older person, all right-thinking people are sickened and disgusted, but it also gives rise to our innate human instinct to protect. Today's motion rests much of that on the Minister and asks her to take up her role in safeguarding these vulnerable groups of people. Going forward, Minister, we must entrust, safeguard and reassure our older and vulnerable people; empower them to report crime and engage with the justice system with as much comfort as possible; ensure that they remain empowered and supported at the end of the process; and see justice served.

Mr McHugh: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Bradley: I will indeed.

Mr McHugh: Where I live, in west Tyrone, many of the vulnerable and elderly people you are talking about live in very isolated communities. The police have informed us that it is organised crime on an all-Ireland basis that subjects those people to the continual robberies in our area. They also acknowledge that it requires an all-island response and that we need close cooperation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána. I hope that the motion recognises that it needs to be responded to, in many respects, on an all-Ireland basis for the isolated people in the communities that I live in.

Ms S Bradley: I accept the Member's point, and I concur. I live in South Down, a predominantly rural constituency that borders the region, and I think everybody in the House will share the view that any perpetrator of crime should have no place to hide on this island or any island and that systems should be cognisant of that.

The whole process, however, will be valued by that final piece. When sentencing is determined, it must recognise the extraordinary courage required of a vulnerable person who has stepped up to engage with the justice system and process. It must also reflect society's absolute disgust at the heinous acts that are often behind the stories of elder abuse.

Mr Beattie: First, I congratulate the Member on her maiden speech. Those five minutes go past pretty quickly, but I look forward to hearing many more in the coming weeks and months.

I support the motion. Why would I not? If, as a society, we do not protect older people, we have serious questions to ask ourselves. I thank the Members who tabled the motion. It is the third motion on crime that we have debated in the past two days. I fully understand, because the point has been well made, that the perpetrators are often affected by socio-economic issues, such as poverty, mental health or drug and alcohol abuse. Some are victims themselves. I get all that, but I make absolutely no apology that I stand to champion the victim. That is what I want to do: I want to stand and champion the victim. I understand fully, however, that it is a cross-departmental issue.

Here is the reality: 52% of older people fear being a victim of crime — 52%. In my council area, 45% fear becoming a victim of crime. I know that Jonny and Dolores will be shocked by that, and they will take steps, as will I. It is an incredible number. Here is where it gets even worse: 30% of older people fear abuse — intentional acts or a failure to act — by a caregiver or another person with whom they are in a relationship that involves an expectation of trust. What we are saying is that 30% of older people in our society are afraid of being a victim of a crime committed by a relative, trusted person or caregiver. There is something insidious about a society that has that level of fear among older people.

If we need an example, we need look no further than Muckamore Abbey and what is going on there. It is truly shocking. The police have identified 1,500 crimes against older people on one ward alone. There were 50 reports of assault against older people between 2014 and 2017. We know that the investigation is ongoing, but those are shocking figures. If they are not a wake-up call, there is something really wrong with us in the House.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beattie: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Clarke: The Member makes a point about Muckamore Abbey Hospital, which is in my constituency. I have written to the chief executive of the trust about the case of a patient who is there currently. The parents are concerned but are reluctant to have a meeting to discuss the case because of their fears for the patient? Is the Member shocked to learn that?

Mr Beattie: I thank the Member for his question. Do you know what? I am not shocked any more. I am not shocked that this is going on or that people are just ignoring it

or trying to shuffle it under the carpet, but I am really saddened by what goes on, the state of society and how older people are being abused. That is what it is: society is abusing our older people. Look at the older people who are being scammed out of the money that they have worked for. One in four of our older people is the victim of a scam, with around 10% of them losing up to £1,000 as a result.

A sentencing review ended, I think, last month. It might have been in January; I am not sure. Chapter 9 of that sentencing review consultation dealt with older people. It asked questions about how we should look at punishments for those who abuse or are violent against older people.

There is no question that there is public anger that our older people are being abused.

11.00 am

Question 54 asks whether there should be:

“a new offence of assault on a vulnerable person (by virtue of their age or other factors)”.

Kellie, you mentioned other vulnerable people, and I take that point, but I am just dealing with older people here. The answer to that question is that there absolutely should be. There must be an offence of assault against older people because they are so vulnerable, and I hope and think that that review will reflect the anger of society and say that older people do deserve a certain type of protection that they do not presently get in our society. We are all going to be old at some stage, and some, including my children, will say that I am already old, but it is not about us growing old but those who are there now. We must take action to protect those people. Therefore, this is a good motion and the right motion. It is a motion that we all have to support, but, more than that, it is a motion that must result in some form of action.

Ms Armstrong: I thank Mr Storey and Ms Bunting for tabling the motion. As someone who has worked with older people, I am grateful that a focus on crime and the effect of crime on older people is being debated today. The motion highlights the report compiled by the Older People's Commissioner, Eddie Lynch, which confirms that being a victim of crime can be a traumatic experience for anyone but that there are particular consequences for older people.

As I said, I worked with older people before. I can give an example of an older lady, who was blind and who, unfortunately, was known to have kept £200 in her house. Lo and behold, one day, two young people arrived at her door purporting to be from the milkman and stole her £200. While that was a terrible event that happened to her, she did not leave her house for six months afterwards for fear that it was going to happen again.

While it is true that crime against older people is, thankfully, rare, the fear of crime is significant among older people. In 2018-19, there were four crime victims aged 65 or over per thousand of the population, 12 per thousand were victims of burglary, 12 per thousand were victims of criminal damage and three per thousand were victims of violence against the person. While the crime levels can be low, we have to be very careful that today's debate does not exacerbate the fear that is felt. As has been spoken about before, the reverberations and the ripple effect do have huge implications.

The report of the Commissioner for Older People had a number of recommendations that I believe have been taken up and are making significant progress to help older people. The report highlights a number of contributory factors for lower crime rates for older people, including delays in reporting crimes because of embarrassment or delayed realisation that a crime has occurred. Support for older people to report is key, and I wish to highlight the excellent work of the support responders service in Ards and north Down. It was launched in December 2018 and then looked at again in December 2019 and still runs today. It provides immediate practical and emotional support to older people when they have become a victim of crime. This type of service helps older people after a crime has happened and encourages others to know that, when their friend has reported a crime, they have received support through that process and, therefore, they too will receive support through that process.

There are wider issues of how we take proactive steps to help older people feel safer in their homes and community, and this is why the role of PCSPs is so important. One positive PCSP initiative is the Belfast home security service that provides home security. We have all seen the door chains and the fake beans cans that you can hide in your house. That helps people who have been recent victims of domestic burglary and also helps people who feel vulnerable that they may become a victim of crime to feel more secure in their homes. This service is aimed at people over the age of 60, and the PSNI crime prevention officers undertake assessments of a house and make recommendations for home security equipment. When that is being fitted, other support services can also be signposted. There are similar schemes in my local village of Cloughey, a tiny wee place. They provide door chains and a good neighbour scheme. They were afraid of the neighbourhood schemes that you see around, so they set up a good neighbour scheme. The result of that has been to build confidence and community cohesion to help to defeat that fear.

Another recommendation raised by the report was having pre-recorded cross-examinations, and I am encouraged that the Department of Justice is exploring that to improve the experience of victims who have had to give evidence in court, meaning that vulnerable victims could give their evidence ahead of trial and outside the courtroom. Not having to attend the trial should reduce the stressful impact on victims, as well as hopefully improving the quality of their evidence as a result. I look forward to hearing from the Minister on the further activities and actions that she intends to bring forward.

Before I take my seat, I will raise an issue about how we treat older people in society. The measurement of respect and inclusion is how we treat our most vulnerable people. The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 defines a vulnerable adult as:

“a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse or exploitation is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, old age, addiction to alcohol or drugs or for any other reason.”

In society, however, we hear of nursing homes and residential homes closing down and of older people being

evicted from their home, with no consideration given to where they will then go to live. We have all heard the terrible stories of abuse that have happened in residential homes for older people.

Mr Buckley: I thank the Member for giving way. I note what Mr Beattie said about the duty on us to look after those in care, but will the Member join me in recognising the many caregivers in residential homes and care homes who do a fantastic service of looking after our elderly when they are at their most vulnerable?

Ms Armstrong: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am just coming to that point.

Although not all homes employ abusers, what systems do we have in place to prevent abusers from going to work with older people? The AccessNI system has worked well to stop people from working with children, but what about with older people?

As the Member pointed out, we also treat those who care for our older people and our vulnerable people as unskilled. Those are the people whom we entrust to look after our mums, our dads and our grandparents —

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

Ms Armstrong: — yet they are allowed to go into homes for only 15 minutes. We must do better.

The Pensioners Parliament has been closed down. We must do so much more to give people voices. With an ageing society that is living longer, we should not allow older people —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Armstrong: — to live in fear, be dismissed or considered an annoyance.

Mr Givan: I thank my colleagues Mr Storey and Ms Bunting for tabling the motion. I put on record our appreciation to Eddie Lynch, the Commissioner for Older People, who commissioned the report. It is the first of its kind into crimes against older people and vulnerable people and looks at their experiences. It is a very worthwhile document.

It is worth bearing in mind that Dr Kevin Brown, a lecturer in criminal law and criminal justice at Queen's University, who conducted the research, said:

"This research has shown that older victims of crime find it more difficult to access justice in Northern Ireland. Urgent reforms are needed to provide better support for older people when they journey through the justice system."

That is a warning that we need to heed. It is a warning that the Justice Minister needs to heed, and the 24 recommendations that were made across the different agencies in the criminal justice system need to be implemented.

When we look at the experiences in the report of some of the older people, there is a recognition that it is a much more traumatic experience for them than it is for other members of the population who endure crime against them. All crime is wrong. The experience that is inflicted on them is something that younger individuals have to bear, but, for older people, there are particular aspects to

it, because they have a greater fear of crime. Mr Beattie made reference to that. They often have fewer support structures in place than younger people. They often live alone, in isolation, so the trauma that they go through is something that we must recognise, and the report highlights that.

Older people are less likely to be a victim of crime, but I caution Members against saying that it is rare, because that can sometimes lead to people not focusing on the issue, when it does need to be focused on. The figures show that there were approximately 5,000 attacks in 2018-19 on people over the age of 65. That level is not rare. In fact, it is far too high. It is wholly unacceptable, and I would not define attacks as being rare incidents, because, unfortunately, they are not rare. They are far too common. We need to have a serious, laser-like focus on what needs to be done to reduce the level of crime against older people.

Members have touched on different aspects of this, and I will pick up on the sentencing review document, which Mr Beattie referred to. I commend it to Members. The consultation on it closed in February. There is a section in it on older people, and it gives a number of areas to look at. One is that we do not have a specific offence for attacks on older people. In the courts system, we have guidance that it should be taken into account as an aggravating factor. Sentencing by the judiciary should reflect that and, if it is unduly lenient, it can be referred to the Court of Appeal. There have been incidents when that has had to happen because of unduly lenient sentences.

Should we go down the route of minimum sentencing, which is something that this place has debated on two separate occasions? Legislation was brought forward in 2015. The House did not accept the minimum sentencing provisions in that, and I can understand some of the arguments that were made about that at the time. Interestingly, the Scottish review is looking at putting that aggravating factor for attacks on older people on a statutory footing. That would require the judiciary to ask, "Did we take it into account? Why was it not taken into account when the sentencing was there?". It would force the judiciary to record the reasons for it, and I often find that, when you have to record your reasons for something, it makes you a little bit sharper when it comes to reaching your determination. I would be interested in exploring that further.

In the hate crime review that he is undertaking, Des Marrinan is looking at adding age as a specific issue when considering hate crime. We need to give due consideration to that. There are a number of different aspects that we can look at with hate crime, but age is one of them that is being actively considered, and there is merit in doing so.

Sinéad Bradley made important comments about defining vulnerability, and that is an issue. The Pensioners Parliament did not say that it is specific to age, and it is difficult to define whether it should be at age 65 or 70. The key aspect was vulnerability, and Ms Armstrong stated that the 2015 human trafficking and exploitation legislation defines what it is to be vulnerable. There is merit in having a consistency of approach across legislation —

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

Mr Givan: — on vulnerability. Those are aspects that we should look at. I commend the motion and trust that it will get the support of the House.

Mr Speaker: I call Órlaithí Flynn. As this is her first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind Members that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Ms Flynn: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and address the House. Ironically, on this day in 2017, I was making an acceptance speech on behalf of Alex Maskey, Pat Sheehan, Fra McCann and myself as we were re-elected to the West Belfast constituency by almost 25,000 voters in the last Assembly election. I have been an MLA for over three years, and this is the first opportunity that I have had to address the House. I will not rehearse the reasons why, but I am happy to say that progress has been made and that I, like many other Members, wish to make a real difference to the lives of the people of West Belfast and wider afield.

As this is my first speech, I would like to take a few moments to acknowledge the great work and example of my predecessor, Jennifer McCann. I am proud to follow and replace her as an MLA and as a proud Irish republican woman. I look forward to representing the people of the Colin area just as well as Jennifer did.

Those who know me know that I have a keen interest in mental health, suicide prevention and women's healthcare issues, particularly the ongoing mesh implant scandal, which has seen so many women injured by those devices. I have had the pleasure and privilege to work with so many great individuals, campaigners, groups and families. I will not name them as I know that, even if the Speaker were to indulge me, it would be nearly impossible to cover them all. During the past three years, as Sinn Féin's mental health spokesperson for the North, I have worked closely with my colleagues in the south, Máire Devine and Pat Buckley. I would also like to acknowledge the genuine relationships and cross-party working that I have experienced since becoming an MLA and chair of the all-party group on suicide prevention. I want to express my appreciation to the Members who sit on that all-party group and have worked collectively to try to tackle the issue of suicide.

Turning to the motion at hand, I welcome the fact that, in May 2019, the Commissioner for Older People published a report calling for a change in how older victims of crime experience the criminal justice system. It is my understanding that several recommendations have yet to be fully implemented. Older people should be able to participate fully in the criminal justice process and have their voices heard.

A review of the existing court set-up should ensure that the needs of all older people are provided for. An enhanced approach, with the relevant agencies working in collaboration, is needed. An example is the roll-out of support hubs, which would bring together key professionals to support victims of crime.

11.15 am

From my work in mental health, I hear a lot of talk about the need to support younger people with access to the internet and social media, but is there the same emphasis on older people and internet use? It is important for older people to become more protective of their personal and

financial details, as statistics show that fraudsters have targeted one in five pensioners in the North.

Crimes such as burglary, vehicle theft, criminal damage and violence without injury intrude on personal space. That invasion of safe spaces can cause severe and lasting harm. As was mentioned, almost half of older people feel more fearful of becoming a victim of crime compared with how they felt two years ago. We do not want older people locking themselves away in their homes through fear of being victims of crime. They may not let neighbours into their house for fear of another burglary, or may stop driving to the shops or to visit friends because they fear that their car might be stolen. That can be the unforeseen impact of crime.

Being a victim of crime can be a traumatic experience for anyone but, as was said, there are particular factors that make older people more vulnerable. We heard about some examples of crime in a care home setting, and, as Members know, the Dunmurry Manor care home in my constituency is the focus of a police investigation into the alleged abuse of elderly residents.

All forms of crime can have a devastating and lasting impact, physically and mentally, on older people. Fear of crime can be damaging to an older person's state of mind and seriously hinder their level of social interaction. Studies show that isolation is a key influencer in the onset of illness and that fear of crime can result in such isolation. The report highlights the fact that it is often the case that the support networks that older people once enjoyed are not as robust as they were due to friends and family members passing away.

Demographics are changing and our older population is increasing significantly, which should be a cause for celebration. However, it also means that we need to rethink how our public services are set up and delivered for their needs. The criminal justice system should be no different. It must be accessible to older people and, importantly, must deliver for them.

I call on the Assembly to support the motion.

Mr Frew: I commend the motion and my colleagues Mervyn and Joanne for tabling it so that Members can discuss this important topic.

We have debated three motions about crime: that is an important fact. It tells us something about where our Members are at, their psyche and how they have the pulse of the communities that they represent. It is good that we can debate the issue

I put on record my thanks to Eddie Lynch, the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, for publishing the report, the first of its kind to shine a light on this important issue.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Stalford] in the Chair)

We all have loved ones who are getting older, and we recognise their vulnerabilities. We recognise the fact that, as we get older, we worry more. That is certainly true for people in the upper age range — the over-75s. They could be living alone out in the country, in an isolated farmhouse up a big long lane. There is absolutely no doubt that their age creates a vulnerability that we may not understand, but we need to.

I have no doubt that those vulnerable, elderly, isolated people are targeted by criminals. That is the reason why I agree with Members' comments that there should be a sentence that identifies that vulnerability. We have aggravating factors, but we need something stronger. The opportunity is there through the Northern Ireland sentencing review, which the previous Justice Minister launched.

Just while I am on my feet and have reminded myself of this, I commend Claire Sugden's comments from last night. She alluded to the current Minister and said that the Department of Justice really is the:

"Department of Failure". — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 126, p206, col 1].

She was not being derogatory about the Department; she basically meant that this needs to be more joined-up, because, ultimately, if it is not joined-up the Department of Justice has to deal with it. I hope that something will come out of the sentencing review that will protect elderly people who are vulnerable because of their age and isolation.

There is also some truth in this: it can take some time for court cases to materialise and then to get to an outcome. That is something we have been grappling with as a society for a long time. We need to be cognisant of the length of time it takes to bring cases to court and to get them out the other end.

The officialdom of court should be considered. It is really scary when you have to step into a courtroom. Some of us have experienced it, some of us will not, and hopefully not ever, but it is a very scary thing, and it is much more so for somebody who is vulnerable, elderly and who does not understand it and maybe gets confused. After looking at the report by Eddie Lynch, the Commissioner for Older People, I see that his recommendation 5 and particularly recommendation 6 talk about an "advocacy scheme" for older people, and that should be looked at seriously.

I am on the Committee for Justice, and I know that the Chair has alluded to this, but we need to ensure that —.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Yes, I will.

Mr Clarke: Will you accept that maybe advocacy is not always the right thing and that this matter needs something with substance? I can think of my own mother, who left her purse on the kitchen table. I said to her, "Why is that purse there?", and she said, "In case somebody breaks in". It is more about communities and bringing our older generation together to a situation where they can actually feel safe in their home as opposed to feeling vulnerable. Advocacy can sometimes be seen as a talking shop.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his intervention. Of course, yes, there has to be some sort of educational scheme whereby we, as family members, can help to alleviate the fear of crime, but the advocacy service will be for when there has been a victim of crime. We need to wrap and support ourselves around that victim and see through the process that they are in, which is not of their choice or making. We should also realise that when vulnerable people are attacked, it is most often a burglary, where people have invaded their space and home and sometimes wreck it, but nonetheless leave that person vulnerable in their own home where they have nightmares and do not want to stay there. That is catastrophic for people.

I know of loved ones and elderly folk who have never recovered from that crime — they never ever recovered — and their health has failed because of it. That is something that we should not tolerate, we should not abide it, and we should do everything in our power to reduce this criminality and take these people off our streets and put them in prison where they belong.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Before we proceed, I will be calling the Minister to respond at 11.37 am, and several people are listed to speak. Members are entitled to use their full five-minute allocation, but I encourage them to be generous with other Members, because a significant number of people still want to speak, and we now have a very limited time.

Ms C Kelly: Older people are the backbone of our communities. They are our parents and grandparents; they are our neighbours and friends. Their home may once have been filled with the busyness of their children, and there was security in that. Now, they may be completely alone, leaving them vulnerable and lacking in the social support that younger people can avail themselves of.

Many years ago, not long after my grandfather passed away, my grandmother was the victim of a burglary in her own home. With that came an intense fear and vulnerability that was not present beforehand. It took a very long time before she felt safe again, especially as those who broke into her home never faced the justice system.

Therefore, we are supporting the motion, and I welcome the recommendations in the crime and justice report from the Commissioner for Older People, as well as the progress to date on the implementation of some of the recommendations, with more work still to be done. In evaluating and implementing the remaining recommendations, the focus must be on prevention, early intervention and improving outcomes for victims.

It is paramount that we do all that we can to help to reduce the fear of crime for older and vulnerable people. We need to increase their confidence and the feeling of safety that they have in their homes and communities. That is especially true of those living in rural areas where they are more at risk of isolation and where PSNI resources are stretched. Crucially, they need to feel empowered and confident that they can access justice without delay.

Education is key in ensuring that older and vulnerable people can feel confident that they have the knowledge to do all they can to keep themselves safe and their homes secure from criminals. They need to be aware of the provision of ongoing prevention advice on everything from burglary to internet crime, information on what to expect from the police and details of organisations that support older people who may feel fearful. Older people must be self-assertive and able to make use of simple crime prevention advice if and when needed.

As our older population continues to grow, we need to ensure that our service delivery and justice system are fit for purpose. With the support of a departmental and cross-agency plan, the implementation of all recommendations will improve the workings of our criminal justice system and better aid older people who are victims of crime or at risk of becoming victims of crime.

Mr McGlone: I will try to be brief. Much of what I was going to say has been said, and I do not want to run the

risk of repetition. Nevertheless, we have to pay reverence to the older people who have made a contribution, been here through good and bad times and deserve the right to live in peace in their home. The valuable work produced by the Commissioner for Older People is very useful to us. It provides a benchmark for how various organisations should be rolling out their projects and engaging better.

One thing that I would like to emphasise, lest it go out from here today that older people are more susceptible to crime than others, is the reality that older people are less likely to be the victims of crime. That reassurance and message must go out. However, for crimes such as burglary, criminal damage, vehicle theft and violence without injury, there is a lower PSNI outcome rate for older people than there is for people in other age groups. That information is contained in the useful research provided to us by the Assembly's Research and Information Service. That needs to be looked at.

I will highlight some of the 24 recommendations in the Commissioner for Older People's report. It recommends:

"The data should be broken down by demographic characteristics".

Maoliosa McHugh referred to some isolated rural areas. I represent similar areas, so it would be useful to hear that data. Roving criminal gangs, some of which come up from the midlands, have been breaking into older people's houses in south Derry.

Mrs D Kelly: I appreciate the Member giving way. Given the cross-border nature of the crime, does the Member share my concerns about the decision of the British Government to drop the European arrest warrant as one of its commitments to Europe? Also, does he share the Chief Constable's concern that there is no updated community safety programme for Northern Ireland? The most recent was published in 2012.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member is entitled to an extra minute.

Mr McGlone: I will not take it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Good man.

Mr McGlone: Those are two very useful points. Perhaps the Minister can reflect on those in her response.

The report recommends that the DOJ engage with the Commissioner for Older People on the recommendations. It recommends that the PPS look at:

"adopting a similar approach to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) of flagging up cases as 'crimes against older people'".

That is particularly useful and important. The recommendation on PSNI and PPS training is also very important. Of course, the issue of:

"a higher no prosecution rate for crimes involving complaints aged 75+ in comparison to the 60-64 and 65-74 age groups"

needs to be drilled down into. That is a requirement.

It is also recommended that:

"A pilot scheme on the introduction of pre-recorded cross-examination and re-examination should be introduced".

That, too, is valuable, along with the recommendations about the judiciary, criminal justice practitioners and the recommendation:

"The PSNI should conduct an audit of human and equipment resources".

There is also a recommendation relating to the court infrastructure.

11.30 am

However, we have some very valuable projects in our constituencies. For example, Agewell in Magherafelt makes almost 500 calls each morning to vulnerable and older people. That is vital. It provides handyman services and key installations to allow access for homecare workers. That is vital for many older people. The role and function of those domiciliary care workers is integral and is a lifeline for older people. It is important to have more tick-tack between the statutory agencies at that level.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He has made a very valid point. The difficulty is that, sometimes, there is little coordination or crossover between those organisations, whether it is call provision or domiciliary care. That cross-departmental working would be very valuable.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for that. I will make one last point. There is a duty on us all to be a good neighbour and to keep an eye out for older people in our communities, particularly in rural areas, who are living alone, sometimes in isolation. We do not need to be nosy or intrusive, but we should keep a watchful eye out for them.

Mrs Barton: Being the victim of crime can be a disturbing and distressing experience for any person, particularly if it impacts on their health, either emotionally or physically, with the dreadful experience being compounded if the victim, perhaps, is from an older age group or is a more vulnerable person.

We have all watched and listened to many elderly people who have been subjected to crime. Who will ever forget the elderly lady from Aghnacloy, in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, who jumped from an upstairs window after her home was broken into? Crime comes in many different guises. We have crime that involves violence against the person; crimes of property, including theft and burglary; cybercrime; telephone scams and Internet scams.

From a survey conducted by Age Sector Platform two years ago, the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament found that the fear of crime was a major concern for two out of three people surveyed — 64%.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Barton: Yes.

Ms Dillon: Does the Member agree that more work needs to be done, particularly to bring older and younger people together? I know that some PCSPs and, in my area, the Youth Service, do some really good work and there needs to be more of that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member is entitled to an extra minute.

Mrs Barton: Yes, I agree; that intergenerational work is excellent and works well. We see it happening in schools at the moment between older and younger people.

Half of the older people in Northern Ireland have become more fearful, as they grow older, of falling victim to crime. Burglary is of particular concern, with one in six adults worrying about being the victim of that crime, and 13% expressing concern about violent crime. Many claimed that that high level of fear of crime impacted detrimentally on their quality of life. They imagined that they were being watched when they were leaving their home and feared returning home, not knowing what one would discover.

While society totally condemns crime against older people, each incident further traumatises the victim and increases fear among the wider population. Unfortunately, a lack of confidence in the statutory agencies, including the Public Prosecution Service, has done little to allay the fear of crime among those people. The length of time that a case can take to get to court and the types and lengths of sentencing that are imposed in cases of burglary and assault on our vulnerable population must be reviewed to gain back the confidence of elderly people.

In trying to assist with bringing the perpetrators to account, many older people claimed that they found the experience of appearing in court daunting, while the progression of failing physical health and memory recall cause problems in trying to bring about prosecutions, especially if the case was taking too long to progress.

With the fear of crime increasing and the number of solved crimes well below acceptable levels, something must be done to reassure our elderly. Measures must be taken to lessen their chance of falling victim. They must feel safe in their home, whether from thugs who enter their home to commit violent attacks, to steal or to commit sexual assaults; from so-called trusted friends responsible for financial abuse; from fraudsters calling at their home and charging exorbitant fees for minor repair work; or from someone preying on them through threatening phone calls or internet scams. All those crimes can have a devastating impact, be it financial loss, physical scars or the effect on emotional well-being. Sadly, others choose to try to forget the experience because of the embarrassment of admitting that they were a victim of crime.

It is essential that our elderly population, who have still so much to offer their families and society, be treated with dignity, listened to and protected. A renewed effort must be made to keep them safe.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Gordon Dunne but remind him that he has about two and a half minutes.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important matter. I thank my colleagues for bringing it forward.

The impact of crime on our older population cannot be overestimated. The Commissioner for Older People's report, launched in 2019, reinforces the need for action to be taken on the issue and provides an extensive series of recommendations to improve the experience of older people across Northern Ireland. Although, overall, older people are less likely to be a victim of crime, the impact that crime may have on their life can be truly devastating. Having assisted older victims of crime through my constituency work over the years, I can say that the mental

and physical trauma that crime can have on older people is serious and can lead to isolation, vulnerability and the loss of independence.

It is important that there be a focus on speeding up justice, and consideration needs to be given to the introduction of screens in court and to the use of pre-recorded evidence and video links to improve the justice process for older people. In the report, there were concerns raised about the time that cases took to get through the court system.

The reintroduction of visible neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) in our communities is a welcome move. Local officers, dedicated to specific areas of work, can get to know residents, including the elderly. They can establish a rapport and build up trust with the local community, including residents' groups; community hubs such as Men's Sheds; luncheon groups, including churches; and the voluntary sector. Visible policing provides reassurance to the law-abiding public and helps to deter criminals. The PSNI needs to focus more on how it deals with crime against older people. It needs to follow up on crime and deal with the victims of con men contractors, as was mentioned by Members. I recall a recent incident when con men contractors got access to an older lady's home in my constituency. They conned her into paying them cash for work. While she was distracted, the con men helped themselves to valuable items in the home. Follow-up action by the PSNI included fitting additional security measures and giving advice on checking the identity of visitors.

Older people can easily fall victim to scams, from telephone calls to direct mailing. Such scams often target vulnerable people. It is crucial that our older population have confidence in the relevant agencies, including the PSNI, the PPS and the court system.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The quality was not constrained in any way by the quantity, so well done.

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): I pass on my gratitude to the Member for North Antrim and the Member for East Belfast for tabling the motion and welcome the opportunity to respond. I also congratulate the two Members who made their maiden speech during the debate. There is no more important issue that they could have chosen on which to address the House.

I thank the Commissioner for Older People for conducting the first piece of research into crime in Northern Ireland from the perspective of older people and those who support them. Before responding in detail, I reassure Members that work on the recommendations in the commissioner's report is already being progressed by my officials in conjunction with delivery partners and an initial draft action plan is being produced. More generally, I very much welcome the report and understand the importance of hearing those voices at first hand so that we can further refine and strengthen service provision. With that in mind, my Department has undertaken similar work in relation to a range of victims, looking at the experiences of those most affected by crime, that has informed policy development in our criminal justice organisations. The commissioner's report highlights the importance of hearing the voices of older people regarding their journey through the criminal justice system and challenges us to develop policy and implement changes to further improve older people's experience. That is a good thing, as it ensures that the right questions are asked of government and

that, collectively, we all work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for victims and witnesses.

While the focus of the motion is on older people, it is important to remember that many of the changes that we, as a justice system, are bringing forward will benefit all victims of crime, regardless of age. System changes should benefit all, with a focus, as need be, on those who are particularly vulnerable by virtue of their circumstances. With older people currently defined as anyone aged 60 or over, it is also important to recognise that not all older people are vulnerable. While there are also unique challenges for some older people, in fact, as Sinéad Bradley rightly highlighted, many older people may be quite offended to be viewed or treated as vulnerable.

To assist those who are victims of crime, my Department currently provides almost £1.8 million to fund services covering three core areas, offering support to almost 50,000 victims of crime annually. This includes emotional and practical support services at court and assistance with criminal injuries compensation applications. Regarding the detail of the report, some of the key areas for my Department are assessing the needs of victims and witnesses of crime, tackling delay, needs assessment, considering the outcomes of our sentencing review, progressing pre-recorded cross-examination and considering what improvements may be made to data collection and communications.

Before turning to the report's recommendations, I will set out some of the wider work that the Department is taking forward in that area. Whilst figures show that older people are statistically less likely to be the victim of crime, they show that older people have the highest level of fear of crime. What statistics do not show is the impact that those crimes have on the lives of older people and their families and the fear that they can generate in a community, as referenced by Robin Newton and others.

Community impact statements are one option to look at critical incidents that have a significant impact on a community and can damage public confidence. The purpose is to enable that community to advise the court on the impact that that crime has had. My officials are willing to discuss with the commissioner how, if an incident occurs that has a disproportionate effect on older people, that can be identified and reflected in a community impact statement. That would also need to involve discussion with the police, who are ultimately responsible for advising on those statements. In recognising that, the Department has also worked with the Commissioner for Older People, the PSNI and St John Ambulance to deliver a pilot support responder service for older victims of crime. That service launched in 2018 in two council areas — Ards and North Down, and Lisburn and Castlereagh — and provides immediate practical and emotional support to older people if they become victims of crime. It is designed to reduce the immediate impact of crime on an older person. The service was reviewed in December 2019 and continues to operate in the two council areas. Uptake of the service in the pilot areas was quite limited due to support provision through family and friends, which is welcome. However, consideration is being given to extending the service to at least one other council area at this time.

In 2018, the Department supported the Age Sector Platform in relaunching its updated 'Feel Safe' guide. It contains a range of crime prevention advice to help older

people keep safe, including details on internet fraud, bogus callers, elder abuse, scam prevention and information on organisations that can help older people feel safe. The Department also supports the Scamwise NI partnership, which aims to raise awareness of scams amongst the general public, including older people, their families and carers. The assets recovery community scheme administered by the Department also provides funding for projects aimed at preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime. While it is not specifically designed for projects for older people, it funds a range of activities that involve working with older people.

Addressing the fear of crime was raised by Catherine Kelly.

The Department works very collaboratively with our network of policing and community safety partnerships, the private sector and the voluntary and community sector. Policing and community safety partnerships have a legislative duty to address crime, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour, and to do so by engaging with the local community. In addition, their initiatives include the support of neighbourhood watch schemes. There is a high level of awareness raising and educational activity aimed at delivering key messages on crime prevention, particularly home security. In 2018-19, PCSPs provided support for 778 accredited neighbourhood schemes that were active across Northern Ireland, covering over 41,933 homes with 996 volunteering coordinators. An example of current PCSP initiatives is the Belfast home security service, providing home security equipment and services to people who have been recent victims of domestic burglary and to older people who feel vulnerable about becoming a victim of a crime of that nature. The service is generally aimed at people over 60 and others who are at risk of becoming victims. The project specifically targets three categories of individuals, including those who have been a victim of burglary to help them feel safer in their homes if they are over 60 years of age or at risk of harm. A PSNI crime prevention officer undertakes an assessment of the house, making recommendations for security equipment to be installed as required. When the successful contractor is fitting the equipment, they also advise of other relevant support services.

11.45 am

I turn now to consideration of the commissioner's report and its recommendations. I look forward to continuing to engage with partners in the statutory and community and voluntary sectors to ensure that the needs of older people are appropriately considered in reviewing current services and taking forward new services. The ongoing work of considering the report's recommendations is being progressed with my officials, and an initial draft action plan has been developed. As Mervyn Storey rightly identified, it is important to recognise that it is not within my Department's gift to deliver on all the recommendations. Many will require collaboration with other delivery partners, criminal justice and other sectors. My officials will meet the commissioner's office to discuss our response to the report before we formalise the action plan.

Today, however, I want to focus on the recommendations that lead to speeding up the justice system, needs assessment, sentencing and pre-recorded cross-examination. Speeding up justice is just one of the big challenges facing the justice system and is a priority for

the Department, its justice partners and the Criminal Justice Board. The speed at which cases progress matters to victims and witnesses, their families and communities, and can help offenders to better understand the implications of their actions and create a better opportunity for rehabilitation. Reducing the time that it takes to complete criminal cases is challenging and complex, and reforms will take time to embed for their impact to be seen. However, as rightly highlighted by Paul Frew and Rosemary Barton, it is crucial to building confidence in the justice system. Reforming committal proceedings is one of the key ways in which we can speed up Crown Court cases, which is why the restored Executive included it in our list of priorities in New Decade, New Approach. I know that the commissioner, like many others, is keen to protect victims and avoid the potential trauma of committal hearings and victims having to give evidence in court twice. A draft committal reform Bill is now at an advanced stage, and I hope to introduce it before the summer recess. As well as abolishing oral evidence from victims and witnesses at committal hearing, the Bill will pave the way for more fundamental reforms that will see certain types of cases directly committed to the Crown Court without the need for a traditional committal hearing.

In the longer term, the Department's aim is to eradicate the committal process entirely for Crown Court cases. Statutory time limits are also referenced at recommendation 19 of the commissioner's report. The intention to introduce these for youth cases was announced by former Justice Minister David Ford in 2012. In reaching that decision, the then Minister considered three independent reports on the criminal justice system: 'A Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland', 'Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service', and the Criminal Justice Inspection's progress report on avoidable delay. All three highlighted delay in processing criminal cases as a significant challenge and concluded that statutory time limits should be introduced as a means of delivering a step change in performance in the system. The consensus across all three reviews was that priority should be given to the youth court, where cases take longer to complete on average than in the adult Magistrates' Court.

I am mindful that the initial discussion regarding the introduction of statutory time limits was some time ago, so it is right to consider the best approach to speeding up the system. To inform thinking around that and the performance of the criminal justice system more widely, the Department has developed data to measure the end-to-end processing times of criminal cases from the point that an incident is reported to police until the case is disposed of in court. That end-to-end performance data has provided fresh insight into delay and has been used to identify the problem areas in the system. Of particular note is that the data has highlighted a disparity in performance between cases that are initiated by way of a police charge and those that the police report to the Public Prosecution Service for a decision on whether to proceed with the case. That has led to the Department taking forward research into why reported or summons cases take, on average, longer than complete charge cases. As a result, the Department, through working closely with its criminal justice partners, has been able to improve performance in certain areas; for example, in the Magistrates' Court. That work will continue to be developed, and further delivery

performance improvements will be made to inform future work on statutory time limits and the wider speeding up of justice reform programme.

I will move on to the sentencing review. A number of Members, including Mervyn Storey, Paul Frew and Paul Givan, raised concerns about sentencing. Recommendation 16 states that:

"Further research should be conducted to explore the types and lengths of sentences imposed".

Ultimately, sentencing is, and must be, a matter for the judiciary. It will balance a range of often conflicting factors to arrive at a sentence that is proportionate to the crime and, at the same time, fits into the overall sentencing framework. Other factors taken into consideration include an offender's personal circumstances, the severity of the crime and the impact on the victim, which can be longer lasting for older and more vulnerable people. Liz Kimmins set out very clearly the effect of crime on older and more vulnerable people; it often undermines their confidence to continue living independently. Although it is natural for victims to want to see offenders punished, talking to victims shows that the experience is that their focus is often more on stopping offending from happening so that fewer people experience similar hurt. It is important that offenders are held to account for their actions and that sentencing deters others from committing offences. However, to reduce reoffending, it is important that problem-solving justice is applied. That looks beyond the offence and finds the causes behind it. International evidence shows that that holistic approach, including tackling the underlying causes, can reduce future crime and the number of victims. Work is being taken forward in that area, including on substance misuse and domestic abuse, to break the cycle of offending behaviour. That is particularly important given the evidence that short-term custodial sentences are not necessarily effective and often result in further criminal behaviour.

As I mention domestic abuse, I turn to the remarks made by Doug Beattie and Órlaithí Flynn about domestic situations. I appreciate that people have real concerns about the abuse of older people in a care or family setting. The new domestic abuse offence that I will shortly bring forward will include instances where an older person is subject to domestic abuse by either a partner or family member. It will apply in cases where children or grandchildren, including those over the age of 18, abuse a grandparent. It is important that that is included in the domestic abuse Bill. We also need to look at opportunities for rehabilitation and some form of recompense for or restoration to the victims.

As you know, the public consultation on sentencing review in Northern Ireland has closed. As things stand, sentencing guidance requires the courts to look at the vulnerability of victims of any crime as an aggravating factor. We need to look at whether additional issues need to be taken into consideration, and we are open to having that discussion.

I will mention briefly needs assessment. It is important that we identify the needs of victims and that we better support them through the system, which is often one that is alien and strange, as it is people's first passage through it. Pre-recorded cross-examination was raised by a number of Members. That is an important measure that has yet to

be introduced, but I believe that it will make a considerable difference in reducing the impact of going to court through cross-examination taking place ahead of the trial and without the presence of the accused.

I thank all those who participated in the debate. I reassure people that we intend to take this important work forward. I particularly value the advice and input of the commission on how it challenges all of us to improve the services that are delivered to older people. As we go forward, the Department will work closely with the commission to deliver recommendations to be addressed through the action plan. I look forward to the continued support of Members as we work together to create a safer and shared community for everyone.

Ms Bunting: Like the Minister, I am grateful to those who participated and for the tone and unanimity that we adopted in the debate. They reflect the seriousness and sincerity with which we approach the issue. I will briefly summarise what I took to be the key events in the debate.

Mr Storey opened the debate by reminding us of the inspiration that the older generation provides to us. He gave us some stark statistics. All were thought-provoking, and some were incredibly worrisome. Mr McCann intervened to talk about the excellent existing organisations in our communities, and he is absolutely right about that.

My colleague Mr Newton spoke about fear, as did a number of Members, and about the fact that it permeates beyond the neighbourhood. It reaches beyond the individual to the family. I, for one, am not ashamed or afraid to admit in the House and to the House that I live in fear of harm coming to my elderly mother and, worse still, by someone's hand. It has already happened. The circumstances were that a man came to her door, forced his way in and insisted that she had an issue with her roof. He repeatedly came back for money, leaving her afraid to come downstairs, to open her blinds, to open her door and to leave her home.

Ms Kimmins spoke about those who go into residential care after a burglary. That is exactly what happened to my gran, and, as with Ms Kelly's experience, it entirely reflects and mirrors my experience when my grandmother was burgled. They locked her in her room. They actually took out a full window. Once it had happened once, it happened twice. We do not know whether it was the same people. Nobody was ever caught. With that came her decline and entry to a residential home.

Ms Kimmins also mentioned that those who are known to the older person or are in a position of trust are often the perpetrators, and she spoke about the fear of repercussions from reporting a crime. A number of Members referred to those key issues. On that point, it would be remiss of me not to congratulate both Members on their maiden speech this morning.

Ms Bradley mentioned loneliness, which, along with isolation, is a key factor in the debate. She reminded us that this whole conversation is about not just the elderly but the vulnerable. She also referred to the barriers to reporting — the embarrassment and the issue of memory/recall — and how all those things are off-putting to those advancing in age. Mr McHugh intervened and spoke about isolation.

Rightly, Mr Beattie kept the focus on the victim. He gave us shocking statistics on the prevalence of abuse. Those are sobering thoughts for us all to continue with in the course of our work in this place.

Ms Armstrong told an emotive story about the impact of theft. She was right when she said that we must be careful not to exacerbate the fear. I am grateful to her for raising a point about the definition of vulnerable and vulnerability. That is another reason why I pay tribute to and thank my friend Lord Morrow for his Act, which brought up that definition. Ms Armstrong also referred to the important issue of safeguarding, and I thank her for that important point.

Mr Buckley referred to the impressive work done by caregivers. It is they who afford many of us the opportunity to continue working to provide for our families while caring for an elderly relative and loved one.

Mr Givan, along with many others, referred to the trauma after an event. He spoke of sentencing and the importance of a consistent approach to the vulnerable.

Ms Flynn, rightly, raised the issue of older people being protective of their financial and personal details. This is the issue: there is a trust and a naivety whereby older people are sometimes prepared to give details over the phone that those who are younger and perhaps wise to scams would not give. She spoke of the devastating impact that those scams can have.

Mr Frew highlighted that the elderly are often targets for criminals and raised the issue of the importance of education on safety.

Mr Clarke mentioned advocacy versus the sense of security through the community.

12.00 noon

Ms Kelly reminded us that our elderly are the backbone of our society. I have already mentioned that her personal experience mirrored my own, and she was right when she spoke of prevention, information and support.

Mr McGlone talked about our elderly deserving the right to live in peace in their homes. I wholeheartedly concur. He spoke of cross-departmental working and said that good neighbours are vital.

Ms Barton raised a harrowing account of a person jumping from a window. She also mentioned statistics regarding fear, as did a number of other Members.

Ms Dillon raised a really important point about the old and the young being brought together. It is so vital in our society, and there are so many great examples of circumstances where the old and the young come together and break down the barriers; the fear on one side and the imparting of knowledge and wisdom on the other. Often, young people will take a bit of advice from the elderly that they would not necessarily take from their parents.

Mr Dunne referred to pre-recorded evidence and video links and the importance of visible policing and the impact that that will, hopefully, have.

I turn to my own remarks, which will be fairly brief. To be the victim of crime is horrendous, but how much more so must it be for those who are older, perhaps alone and certainly vulnerable. Even the word "victim" is synonymous with all things unpleasant and serves to bring home our

own potential frailty, because anyone can be the victim of crime. That said, we take this issue seriously, not just because we think, "There but for the grace of God go I", but because many of us in this Chamber are at that time in our lives when we are faced with caring for an elderly loved one. We are watching those who were invincible to us in our childhood become those for whom we fear and will protect with all we have.

Perhaps to my shame, I had not read the report prior to the debate. It pinpointed and crystallised what I had considered to be the issue, prior to sitting for a time and empathising with those in our society who are a bit older: the fear of crime and the reasons for preferring not to report it, to which many Members have alluded. What also struck me was that a lifeline can also be a threat, including the telephone, which is also a resource for the scammer, and even things like handrails for outside steps, to the bad guys, can be indicative of vulnerability.

As recently as yesterday, an elderly lady in east Belfast was burgled. Her home was ransacked and money and jewellery were stolen. Only a couple of weeks before that, two men entered an elderly couple's home with hatchets. Just imagine, and this is the rub, the psychological impact; the desecration of their personal safe haven and sanctuary; and the ensuing loss of confidence. That highlights their vulnerability and mortality. It is a reminder that we are not what we once were. Who among us wants to face that reality?

It is important that we get this right. The fear of crime is debilitating and paralysing and can lead to isolation, which only exacerbates the problem. I am grateful for the Minister's presence, words and actions to date and for her proposed actions. I look forward to working with her, the commissioner, the police and the Policing Board towards improved outcomes.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister of Justice to develop a departmental and cross-agency plan to implement the recommendations of the May 2019 report of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland entitled 'Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland'.

Areas of Natural Constraint

Mr McAleer: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs decision to end areas of natural constraint support; notes that the decision has had a negative impact on farmers in severely disadvantaged areas; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to use the powers contained within schedule 6 to the Agriculture Bill (HC Bill 7) to bring forward a new areas of natural constraint scheme.

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

Mr McAleer: The British Agriculture Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 16 January this year, and it sets out a number of powers and measures, some of which apply to the North. In the context of the motion, the specific element that I am referring to is Part 1 of schedule 6, which, at the Minister's discretion, makes provision for elements of a direct payment, including a payment for areas of natural constraint (ANCs).

Figures in the research pack, which was kindly provided by the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISE), show that the North is heavily reliant on agriculture for its share of gross value added (GVA) and percentage of total employment. Indeed, the Committee recently heard evidence that in the region of 100,000 people are employed in the food and drink industry in the North. It is a huge sector and is worth about £4.5 billion per annum. Compared with England, Scotland and Wales, the North also has the smallest average farm size, with grass-based cattle and sheep accounting for 89% of the total number of farms. We have more dairy, cattle and sheep less-favoured area (LFA) farms and ANC farms than any other devolved region.

Seventy per cent of land in the North is defined as a less-favoured area and has been eligible for such support since 1975. Although we have the most beautiful hillsides, rugged countryside and undulating landscapes, those bring challenges for farming, such as difficult topography, poorer soil quality, rooting depth and many more biophysical issues that are criteria for areas of natural constraint funding. As a result, farm incomes are very low. Farms rely on EU direct support, especially those in ANCs, which to many farmers are better known as less-favoured areas. Farmers are producers of food, but they are also the custodians of the countryside. Without direct support, as many as 30% of farms will go out of business. Those are figures that we received from Queen's recently. That would result in land abandonment and have a huge negative impact on the rural economy and local services. As such, it is vital that we tailor an agriculture policy to the needs of farming in the North. Indeed, we are undertaking that process at present.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mr McAleer: Yes.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member agree with me that the withdrawal of EU direct support will have an impact on much more than just farming, in that it will also have a potentially serious environmental impact?

Mr McAleer: Yes, I agree with that. As I said, the evidence that we received in Committee recently shows that, if direct support to our farms ends, at least 30% of them will go out of business. Although I do not have figures for the LFAs and ANCs, I am certain that the percentage would be much higher than 30% in such areas. Yes, land abandonment absolutely has a huge environmental impact, as well as having wider social and economic impacts.

Farmers in those areas are very restricted in the choices that they can make. They do not have the option to rotate their crops and they cannot grow cereals. As much as they can do is maintain their grasslands and their beef and sheep. They are at the end of the livestock production chain and vulnerable to price fluctuations. Hill farmers and farmers who are not on hills but are in areas that are designated areas of natural constraint need that mitigating payment because of the additional challenges that they face. The payment exists to create a more level playing field with lowland producers and, indeed, with their counterparts in the South, who are fortunate enough still to have the EU support and access to a wider range of support schemes than the rest of the country.

A policy document that accompanies a recent report from the National Farmers' Union (NFU) states that the value of hill farming must be recognised in order to shape the social and economic needs of people living in rural areas and that weather, rising costs and disease lead to hill farmers getting less for their produce while facing increasing production costs.

That is a good summary of the challenges.

Indeed, the former Agriculture Minister Michelle O'Neill, who is now the deputy First Minister, took the decision to go some way towards addressing that disadvantage by introducing the ANC scheme in the rural development programme for 2014 to 2020. That was a follow-on from her predecessors, the former Ministers Michelle Gildernew and Bríd Rodgers, who, in their time, continued with the less-favoured areas (LFA) compensation allowance. As I stated previously, that type of support had been available since 1975.

A subsequent Minister in 2016 made the decision to withdraw those mitigating measures and, in the process, created these additional challenges and inequalities. At the time, Sinn Féin expressed concern that the Department had not applied the proper regard to meeting its statutory functions under section 75 to promote equality of opportunity, because it is a matter of fact that certain sections of the community are more adversely impacted upon by that decision than others. It is well documented that hill farmers struggle to make an income. The ANC allowance was important for farmers to tackle the barriers to hill farming and help make it become more viable. Indeed, the guide to the 2018 ANC scheme states that:

"The ANC Scheme provides for a payment to farmers with land in the Severely Disadvantaged Area (SDA) to compensate for all or part of the additional costs and income forgone related purely to the constraints for agricultural production in the area."

Turning to single farm payment, because the two are interconnected, it is important to note that, for historical reasons, the per-hectare entitlement of farmers in severely disadvantaged areas is below the regional average. In 2014, the then Minister, Michelle O'Neill, set in place a transition towards an equal rate, which is sometimes referred to as a flat rate, whereby, over the course of the seven-year transition period, farmers' payments that were below the regional average would incrementally increase, and farmers' payments that were above the regional average would incrementally decrease, until all farmers received the same amount per area-based entitlement by 2021. I think that the predicted value was in the region of €330 per hectare. However, I have noted that Mr Poots is intent on halting that transition towards equality. We are now five years into the seven years of that transition period.

I should add a caveat: we have always been concerned that, even if the seven-year transition period was implemented and all farmers received the same flat rate of €330 per hectare by 2021, farmers in the ANC scheme with land in severely disadvantaged areas still deserve that additional mitigating payment:

"to compensate for all or part of the additional costs and income forgone related purely to the constraints for agricultural production in the area."

We responded to the DAERA consultation on the option for a basic payment scheme entitlement unit. We made it very clear that the Department should continue the transition towards the flat rate and emphasised the need to support farmers in severely disadvantaged areas and continue the ANC. We have made the case very strongly to departmental officials that the redistribution of pillar 1 funding does not constitute substantial mitigation for the withdrawal of the ANC payment. We told the Department that the failure to mitigate the withdrawal of the ANC payment would result in negative, adverse impact on farmers who live in severely disadvantaged areas. I should say that this payment continues throughout the EU, in the South of Ireland and in Scotland. We can see the devastating impact that the withdrawal of that funding has had on farmers as we speak. According to DAERA's own figures, the number of suckler cows is at its lowest since 1998. The withdrawal of the ANC payment is a contributory factor to that and the loss of farmers' income. The total income from farming fell by 25% between 2018 and 2019. That is all compounded by the uncertainty caused by Brexit.

In the South of Ireland, the Government have invested more heavily in agriculture. For example, €250 million is available to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine towards its ANC payment, and there are a range of other support schemes and the area-based single farm payment. Indeed, at the Committee recently, the UFU made the point that the support payment to farmers in the South must be tracked and, if possible, matched so that the North can compete in an all-Ireland economy with counterparts in the South. I should also have pointed out that almost 50% of suckler cows and 60% of the ewe population is grazed on the severely disadvantaged areas, so the production of livestock in the hill and upland areas is crucial to supporting the finishers and the red meat industry in the North.

12.15 pm

In conclusion, there is now an opportunity under the new powers in the Bill to introduce a new areas of natural constraint scheme, and we call for the Minister to use his power to introduce the scheme as a priority.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That was nine minutes and 59 seconds. Excellent. Well done.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, and, in doing so, I acknowledge the situation facing farmers in areas of natural constraint and severely disadvantaged areas as we move beyond current funding models towards a unique and, I hope, specifically tailored UK support scheme. I firmly believe that the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland has been embraced and welcomed by vast swathes of the Northern Ireland public, and I know that for many farmers it has signalled an important opportunity to be involved fully in the shaping of a policy and support system that will deliver, sustain and encourage growth post Brexit.

As we know, the industry in Northern Ireland across all sectors and all land types has relied on payment support schemes over the years, which have assisted farmers to operate in a highly competitive agri-food industry in Northern Ireland. There is a valid argument that this competitive marketplace could become more competitive, depending on the types of decisions made on market access. I am of the opinion that a very real effort must be made to ensure that a very high quality and stringently placed product should be protected and promoted, given the high standards in food production in Northern Ireland. The quality of our food is what makes it stand apart and what makes Northern Ireland products sought after. We must ensure that this quality continues.

In Committee in recent days, we heard from various representative groups and stakeholders on the issue of support and what it would look like, and there is a widely accepted narrative that support must take all sectors into account. However, what that support will actually look like remains to be thrashed out. The farming industry generally is aware of the difficulties faced by those farming in areas of natural constraint and the challenges that this presents. Indeed, active farming in SDAs provides an important service over and above food production by maintaining the land in these challenging conditions, so contributing vitally to ecosystems in these regions of Northern Ireland. That is no small undertaking and contributes positively to the protection of the environment.

As we look to future support, there has been a consensus through various consultations, carried out, for instance, by the Ulster Farmers' Union, that area-based payments is not perhaps the best means of promoting growth in the sector and that any new arrangement needs to be more focused on production. There is also a recognition of the unique challenges of severely disadvantaged areas, and, at recent AERA Committee meetings, that has been debated across the party spectrum.

While the motion calls for the Minister to use powers to bring forward a new areas of natural constraint scheme, I feel that a much greater discussion is required on wider support for agriculture in Northern Ireland to ensure that, whatever support scheme is enacted going forward, it is as supportive as possible of productive, profitable and sustainable agriculture. It must be stated that farmers

in SDAs gained from convergence and that transfer of money came at the expense of lowland and disadvantaged area farmers. It is also worth noting that Northern Ireland receives the largest per hectare payment in the British Isles. In moving to a new support system, this must be recognised.

Mr McAleer: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr Irwin: Yes.

Mr McAleer: Does the Member accept that, when the entitlements were introduced in, I think, 2005, sheep and hill farmers had been labouring under an unfairly low average entitlement and that this was the only chance of getting a bit of equality?

Mr Irwin: Yes, under convergence, there is no doubt that hill farmers did benefit and that that brought up their payment much higher than it originally had been. There is no doubt about that, and I think that that is accepted widely.

Sinn Féin will know, given that it held the Agriculture Ministry in the past, that ANCs require ministerial direction to sign off, signalling that it was a more difficult proposition, and, indeed, it agreed a scheme for only two years before a review of its future. It was Minister McIlveen who, following that, ensured that farmers received a payment in 2018 to have a period of transition.

ANC is clearly not the best support mechanism, and, as a member of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, I urge the Minister to use the opportunity that presents itself to ensure that support measures post Brexit reflect profitability and sustainability. I will certainly use my position on the Committee to argue strongly for those bedrocks. Our industry must be built on sustainability, going forward. Support measures must have clear benefits and outcomes. That is where the debate on future payment models will have to take seriously the views of all sectors in Northern Ireland.

With that in mind, I do not support the motion, and I urge all members of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to get involved in the debate and scrutiny of future support mechanisms.

Mr Catney: As has been said, agriculture is a massive part of our economy, our landscape and our way of life. I have always considered myself a countryman, but, after I went to talk about sustainable dairy farming at Greenmount, I found my country credentials extended only to the odd céill in an old farmer's barn somewhere. I gathered potatoes for Mrs Wilson, who, I think, was a relation of our Minister, and I learnt early on that it was better to go to the local publican in The Four Trees in Moira rather than be outside gathering potatoes or picking strawberries in the cold weather. I will always remember Mrs Wilson saying, "You might leave the house tired after your day's work, but you will never leave it hungry". I have good memories of that.

There needs to be a better understanding of the impact that agriculture has on all our lives. It is not a stand-alone issue but one that integrates with all areas of life. That is why the impact of agriculture is important to consider when looking at the single policies of areas of natural constraint. In my view, removing that single policy would have a much wider detrimental effect on agriculture and on the whole of society.

The proposal also comes at what is one of the most difficult times for our farming industry in recent history. The uncertain effects of coming out of the common agricultural policy, farm incomes falling as much as 23% in the past year and a half and the growing impact of climate change have placed extraordinary pressures on our farmers. To then cut payments for areas of natural constraint for our farmers on the worst land with the poorest soil and the harshest conditions has to be a step too far for all of us. I also noted with alarm, while researching the motion, that, as the proposer stated, 70% of the land in Northern Ireland fell into the criteria of less-favoured areas. I know that has changed for ANC, but it is still an incredibly large amount of our agriculture industry that the loss of this income will impact on.

I understand the argument, particularly in a time of climate emergency, for our agriculture policy to promote and encourage environmental use of the land, whether that be through the growth of forests or allowing land to fall back into its natural habitat. However, it is not sustainable to do that at the expense of our farmers, who are in great hardship. I think that a balanced way forward can be found that supports our farmers in areas of natural constraint as well as protecting the environment and the productivity of our farming sector.

Some 70% of all land in Northern Ireland is for agricultural use. As politicians, we give no certainty to our farmers, with conflicting stories coming every day about what the future of agricultural support will look like, about trade deals flooding our markets with low-cost, lower-standard food that our farmers cannot compete with and about how we will pay for that and help our farmers produce the food that we all need. Removing the support for areas of natural constraint will create another hurdle for our overworked farmers to jump over.

I learned a lot during my visit to Greenmount; in fact, I do not think that there is much that I did not learn about sustainable dairy farming. I learned that I could not do what our farmers do. They are vital to our ongoing prosperity and must, where possible, be supported. That is why I ask the Minister to look again at the ANC scheme and find a way to support our farmers working in extreme hardship.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: If going berry picking occasionally qualifies you as a countryman, the Stalfords of Branial qualify as country people as well.

Mrs Barton: In Northern Ireland, family-based farming enterprises are an important part of our community. Northern Ireland is unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, Europe and, indeed, the world, where large factory-farming techniques have been established and agricultural products are churned out without the same consideration or management of the excellent quality products and protection of the environment that we have here.

Farming on poorer land has always been a challenge, irrespective of where you farm. In Northern Ireland, there has always been the persistent and perpetual farming mentality that, despite not making a profit, the individual farmer will stick with it and continue their quality production.

There has long been support for local hill farmers or those who farm severely disadvantaged areas. Previous to areas

of natural constraint, the less-favoured area compensatory allowance was in place. DAERA's figures highlight that farms in severely disadvantaged areas are well over £100 per hectare worse off than lowland farms. With the removal of areas of natural constraint payments, it is estimated, around 10,000 farms will be impacted.

A very large percentage of land in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone falls within the severely disadvantaged area standards. On hill farms, there are limited options for crops, with grass the only feasible option.

The Sinn Féin motion raises concerns that the areas of natural constraint payments were ended, but the reality is that a consultation on the future of the ANC scheme was carried out in 2016. The consultation was ordered on the watch of a Sinn Féin ARD Minister and decided on by a DUP AERA Minister. It was that same AERA Minister who, in December 2016, announced that 2018 would be the final year of the ANC scheme and that, even then, it was to have a budget of only £8 million compared with the previous budget of £20 million. The Ulster Unionist Party wanted funding for the scheme to be kept in place. We believed that there was sufficient scope in the overall Executive funds to pay for it. The last Executive squandered hundreds of millions of pounds, not least on pet projects such as the extravagant new DAERA offices at Ballykelly, but, still, many staff are retained in Dundonald House. It was simply not true that continuing to fund the scheme from Executive funds was impossible.

I hope that a new, equivalent scheme will be developed and that hill payments will be reinstated. Not only would that assist the farmers of severely disadvantaged land but most of the money would go back into the community.

Mr Blair: Similar to what Mr Catney and, perhaps, Mrs Barton said, I will speak on behalf of the Alliance Party in the hope that we can achieve an outcome, although I recognise that such an outcome will require some balance.

I speak, however, in general support of the motion, its principle and sentiment. Let me explain: there have been changes in financial processes, regulations and, indeed, in ministerial directions. It has been said already that those changes have not come about abruptly; they have been made over time. However, we have a duty to hill farmers, including those on smaller hill farms that, it might be said, are less productive overall than others in the agricultural sector that we hear about more often.

12.30 pm

Smaller hill farms are a vital component of the family farming community. They have a crucial role in Northern Ireland in, for example, conservation of the countryside, maintaining the landscape, preserving tourist potential and, in some cases, protecting the coastline.

It has to be said, however, that there is some potential for conflicting evidence in payments made under the basic payment system in comparison with what went before. That is worthy of further and more detailed examination, so that we can ascertain properly what the actual losses and gains are to those directly involved.

At the time of the Bew report, there were many offices and representatives campaigning against payments being allocated purely on land area. However, where there is

evidence that current arrangements have introduced disparity, as I said previously, we need to reassess the system. In that regard, I draw attention to the fact that the motion refers to:

“to bring forward a new Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.”

It does not prescriptively say that the scheme introduced has to be exactly the same as the scheme that was there before.

In that regard, I urge the Minister to pay attention to the outcomes of the payment arrangements that are in place, give full assessment to those most affected by the current system and, in doing so, pay due regard to those in severely disadvantaged areas. Apart from that, I support the motion.

Mr M Bradley: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I acknowledge the difficulties facing the farming industry post Brexit and the uncertainty surrounding the Northern Ireland/Ireland protocol. I share the concerns of many that the exceptionally high standards set in our agri-food industry. The extensive traceability of our products must be maintained. Food produced here is of the highest quality worldwide. Protection of the environment is woven into the fabric of farming itself. Therefore, it is good that motions such as this are debated in the devolved Assembly, as is right and proper.

The areas of natural constraints scheme is a land-based payment, and many farmers have been critical in the past of payments made via the basic payment scheme. Many have queried what public good is delivered and whether it presents good value for money, as it is a land-based payment that is not targeted to either the environment or productivity.

The Minister at the time, Michelle O'Neill, gave a commitment for an ANC scheme for two years, 2016 and 2017, followed by a review before the scheme could continue. Minister Michelle McIlveen ensured that the scheme was available to allow payments to 2018, to give farmers a transitional period. It is clear that our farming industry needs continued support. That will have to be tailored for the marketplace that we find ourselves in, both locally, within the GB market, and in the Republic of Ireland market.

Some may argue that the Republic of Ireland has maintained the ANC scheme, and it has. However, it has a maximum claim area, and it has also converged towards a flat rate, at the slowest rate possible under EU rules. It has a lower average payment per hectare.

Some have suggested that the removal of the ANC scheme is an attack on hill farmers, but it is not. Productive farmers in hill areas keeping sheep and cattle with an above average per-hectare payment, could be impacted upon greatly by any move to a flat-rate payment, with much greater consequences than the removal of the ANC.

It is time to look at a new way of doing things in consultation with the industry. The question has to be asked whether new arrangements can be focused on production. Instead of harking back to old schemes, we should be focusing on new opportunities, targeting the needs of productive farmers in all areas.

The motion calls on the Minister to use powers to bring forward a new areas of natural constraint scheme. Is it as simple as that? I do not think so. Further discussions and consultations must be held to ensure that whatever scheme is preferred should be one that is supportive of and beneficial to the industry. It should be a scheme that has merit and a clear delivery outcome. A continuation of the ANC scheme towards a flat rate could have a detrimental impact on farmers in severely disadvantaged areas (SDAs).

In closing, I ask the Minister to give a commitment that he will look at new ways of supporting all farmers to become more productive, profitable and sustainable.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I remind Members that it is convention in the House that a maiden speech is heard without interruption. I call Ms Emma Sheerin.

Ms Sheerin: Is onóir an-mhór domhsa labhairt libhse anseo inniu. It is a massive honour for me to speak here today and to speak to you as a representative of Mid Ulster. I follow in the footsteps of my friend and colleague Ian Milne, a man who has spent his entire adult life as a political activist, standing up for what is right, even when it was dangerous to do so. Ian continues to work as a public representative as the Bellaghy councillor for the Moyola district electoral area (DEA), and I continue to enjoy working alongside him, as well as the 16 other Sinn Féin councillors on the district council, whom I also want to thank.

As one of three Sinn Féin MLAs for Mid Ulster, I am blessed to have the support and guidance of two fantastic sisters in the constituency — Linda Dillon and our party vice president, Michelle O'Neill — as well as that of our MP, Francie Molloy, who has been at the forefront of this movement for five decades and has been a personal mentor to me.

Mid-Ulster is a brilliant place in which to live. It is half Derry and half Tyrone, but the rivalry between the two ends on the football field. There is a diverse and brilliant community that stretches from the top of the Carn, overlooking Swatragh and Slaughtneill, right down to Coalisland and Pomeroy. The people are full of ingenuity and industry. Engineering is a massive sector in mid-Ulster, evidenced by the fact that over 80% of the world's crushing and screening equipment is manufactured there.

In the east are Ardboe and Ballinderry on the shores of Lough Neagh, which has Europe's largest wild eel fishery. My own Ballinascreen is in the west, nestled between Slieve Gallion and the rest of the Sperrins, where agriculture still provides for families who oftentimes have been farming the land for generations. As an MLA, I want to promote and support everything that is positive about our district, and I want to find solutions to the problems. I want to help the people whom I represent, and I believe that government has a vital role in aiding those who are at a natural disadvantage.

The ANC payments carried out precisely that function. After decades and decades of myriad schemes that discriminated against the hill farmer, Michelle O'Neill's transition to a flat rate, combined with the ANC payment, gave those people breathing space. I declare an interest at this point: I am the daughter of a sheep farmer from the Sperrins. I was reared in a farming family that stretches

back generations. I understand, more than anyone, the unique challenges faced by our mountain farmers.

As was said previously, 50% of suckler cows and 60% of the ewe population in the North are grazed on ground that is considered severely disadvantaged. Some 30% of mid-Ulster is made up of SDA land, namely the rough hilly ground of the Sperrins. Farmers who own and work that land do so against a multitude of challenges. From poor and fluctuating farm-gate prices to rising fuel and feed costs and the annual worry about the weather, everything is felt more extremely on the mountainside.

The Irish climate, combined with poor soil quality, makes growing fodder difficult, but the people who cut and bale the silage still need to be paid. The vet's bills still arrive, and the machinery still needs to be serviced. The ANC payment was not a top-up to a farmer's income that allowed for a second holiday that year. It did not lead to investment in banking shares, but it did go into the coffers of the small farm-supply shop, the independent contractor putting up a bit of fencing or the family business struggling to survive. Those are the funds that keep rural Ireland ticking.

There are no guarantees when you are engaged in this industry. At the end of 2019, roughly 80% of farm income came from EU subsidies. Now, with the uncertainty of Brexit and what it means for the single farm payment, there is an added worry for those producing lamb and beef. Equality is not simply about treating everyone equally; equality is about creating an environment in which everyone has an equal chance. As a representative of those living in a rural area who have not always had that equal chance, I am urge the Minister to introduce a new areas of natural constraint scheme.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member and I want to be first to congratulate her on making her maiden speech in the Assembly: congratulations.

Ms Dolan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion. As many of you know, I represent Fermanagh and South Tyrone, a border constituency that sees approximately £46 million a year in single farm payment. Furthermore, statistics show that almost 92% of land in Fermanagh is severely disadvantaged. In the Minister's parliamentary constituency, only 2.5% of land is severely disadvantaged.

In addition to introducing a transition to a flat rate of farm payments, Sinn Féin Minister Michelle O'Neill initiated the areas of natural constraint scheme as a support mechanism for farms in severely disadvantaged areas. The ANC scheme was a clear recognition of the need for a bespoke response, in addition to the move to a flat-rate payment, to address inequalities in the system. Such inequalities are recognised in the South of Ireland and Scotland, both of which have ANC schemes that they have committed to continuing.

It is well documented that many farmers struggle to make an adequate income. The ANC allowance was important to farmers for tackling the main barriers to farming and helping it to become viable. I live in a border constituency where the ANC payment has ended, yet our neighbours in the South, who could be as close as the next field, have seen the Government investing more heavily in agriculture: approximately €250 million is available towards the most severely disadvantaged farmlands. Sinn Féin opposed

the decision taken by the DUP Minister of Agriculture to end the ANC scheme payment. The consequence of that decision was the recreation of inequalities and the loss of £20 million a year to farmers in severely disadvantaged areas.

As has been said, almost 50% of suckler cows and 60% of our ewe population in the North reside on farms in SDA areas. That breeding population produces a significant quantity of livestock that is then used for further breeding or finishing on lowland farms. Production in hill areas is therefore of huge strategic importance in the context of supporting the red meat industry in the North.

Full convergence or transition to a flat-rate payment is an important move in addressing inequality in the agriculture sector and, as such, it must be achieved within the seven-year time frame set out by Sinn Féin Minister Michelle O'Neill and endorsed by the Executive in 2014. It is disappointing that the Department has decided to freeze that. Transition to a flat-rate payment does not by itself address the difficulties facing farmers in SDA areas who face constraints relating to the quality, topography and location of their land.

Sinn Féin strongly disagrees with DAERA's analysis in its February 2016 consultation on options for future support to areas of natural constraint, but the redistribution of pillar 1 support in favour of SDAs is a hugely significant mitigation. We also disagree with DAERA's view that redistribution of pillar 1 will contribute significantly towards compensating SDA farmers for the termination of the ANC scheme. Flat-rate payments will not address the geographical and topographical challenges facing severely disadvantaged areas or sufficiently fill the gap created by the ending of the ANC scheme.

The exceptional adverse challenges of farming in ANC areas, and the importance of a Department fulfilling its statutory obligation under the Rural Needs Act 2016 to pay due regard to that and introduce mitigating measures, such as a full transition towards a flat rate and the restoration of the ANC annual payment, must be recognised and taken into account when developing policy.

Mr McCrossan: I too congratulate the Member for Mid Ulster on her maiden speech. I sincerely hope that she finds herself as a Tyrone woman and not a Derry woman.

Mr McAleer: *[Inaudible.]*

Mr McCrossan: I am sure you have influence over her, Declan.

I support the motion and thank those Members who brought it before the Chamber. It is important that we send a clear message to our farming community across the North that they will no longer be left behind. That includes ensuring that those farmers who farm less favourable land are not disproportionately impacted on by the House or by something that is as catastrophic as Brexit. It will have a huge impact on our farming community. That is well-documented by many farmers across the 18 constituencies of Northern Ireland, regardless of their background or belief; it is generally accepted that Brexit will have a devastating impact on agriculture here.

Many of our farmers are struggling and are in need of support. It is important that we use this debate to convey that support directly to them and to the organisations that represent their interests. As I said, our farming community

has benefited substantially from EU money for decades and from schemes that have not only kept farms alive but contributed significantly to their output.

12.45 pm

Like many in the Chamber, I take great offence when farmers are accused of being paid for nothing. We hear that but, in fact, people need to realise the work and endless hours that a farmer puts in to ensuring that his land is farmed and the great sacrifices that are made. Some farmers do not go on holiday, and some will not even leave the house for a day because they are afraid to leave the farm because they are so dedicated to it. That is a generational thing that has come through, and I can speak about many people in my constituency in that regard.

I do not need to convince the House that our farmers across Northern Ireland are world class and that they provide world-class produce that is exported around the globe. It is with great concern that we are here today to represent those farmers who, through no fault of their own, have lost entitlements because of the removal of the ANC support last year. ANC represents the less favourable areas of land — again, that was discussed in great detail by other Members — mostly on hills. My constituency is quite hilly, as Declan McAleer, my constituency colleague, mentioned.

The ANC accounts for 44% of all farmland across the North, and ANC payments were meant to protect those farmers because of their disadvantage and to ensure that there was an equal playing field. However, that funding, which amounted to around £20 million spread over 9,000 applications, has now been removed. Many farmers have been left in a state of limbo, unable to plan for the future or for their families and their farms. That is unacceptable, and it is why we need to do something tangible about it. Regardless of which farm I have visited, that comes across very clearly.

Over 60% of the farmland in my constituency of West Tyrone is designated as severely disadvantaged, and that includes areas such as Dromore, Ruskey, Castlederg and the Glenelly valley. I have met farmers and local community groups who hold the view that the removal of the ANC payments was disproportionate for farmers in West Tyrone and, indeed, in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. They are not able to compete with producers in many more favoured areas and do not have the luxury of simply converting to dairy, arable farming or potatoes. Indeed, DAERA's statistics show that upland farms' income is £114 less than that of lowland farms. The compensation that they were provided with for so long has been removed, with very little care given.

In West Tyrone, farms in the Glenelly valley not only have to deal with those cuts but are still in financial despair, given that their farms, livelihoods and businesses were decimated by the flooding in 2017. I have documented that very well; I know that the Minister has taken it seriously, and I appreciate any response that he has given to me in that regard. Almost three years later, they have still not been properly compensated and, as I said, I hope that the Minister will move swiftly on that.

The debate is not only about ANC payments but the wider fundamentals of future farm payments, following the end of CAP in December. Farmers have concerns about their

funding post 2020 and, again, Brexit has compounded that. Will the British Government commit to the same levels of EU funding for our farmers? That remains to be seen. If the New Decade, New Approach funding is anything to go by, I have no faith that they will do what is right for the agricultural community.

I welcome the fact that my constituency colleague has brought this issue to the House, but it is a bit frustrating that Sinn Féin is back in the Chamber asking for funding to be reinstated that was removed as a result of a consultation by the Sinn Féin leader, then Minister, Michelle O'Neill, back in 2016.

Ms Bailey: I support the motion, which:

“calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to use the powers contained within schedule 6 to the Agriculture Bill (HC Bill 7) to bring forward a new areas of natural constraint scheme.”

It is pretty basic stuff, really. The Agriculture Bill that is working its way through Westminster will set the post-Brexit agenda for the UK agri-sector for decades to come. We need to get this right, and schedule 6 is the only part that directly addresses Northern Ireland's future. Suffice to say that it raises more questions than it answers in terms of compliance with the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol, with our climate and biodiversity commitments and with sustainability measures that will be fit for purpose in the greening decade to come.

Given that we also know that Scotland will introduce its own primary legislation for the future of its agriculture and that Wales is working towards producing legislation, it is clear that there will be no UK framework to rely on. We need our own plan for our own future that meets our own needs.

If we are to move towards production models, it needs to be sustainable production and future-proofed productivity. Our farmers in severely disadvantaged areas need to be given solid assurances that we will protect them and that they deserve to have access to specific and targeted economic interventions. They also need to know that their hard work and dedication are invaluable to wider society.

Farm incomes across Northern Ireland are down, and the Minister himself told us that. They are down 25% in the last financial year, if I remember correctly. Northern Ireland farm business surveys tell us that that is expected to plummet even further. ANC payments across the UK vary greatly. For example, Scotland budgeted £450 million at the same time that we spent £8 million. Until we have a financial plan in place, we should not further stress disadvantaged farmers.

The Green Party —

Ms Dillon: I appreciate you taking the intervention. Does the Member agree that a review is good practice whenever a new scheme is implemented and that the outcome of that review should not have resulted in these payments being removed, given all the evidence that we have heard today?

Ms Bailey: I thank the Member for her intervention, and she raises important points. Change is fluid at the minute, and everything should be continually reviewed. We are facing phenomenal change in the face of Brexit, and we need to put plans in place.

The Green Party aims to further the social, environment and economic well-being of those involved in our agricultural sector. We have an opportunity to renegotiate a scheme to recognise market realities, such as farm size, and future challenges, such as climate change. We have the opportunity to re-evaluate what we consider to be economically productive. For example, what will be the economic value of the tree-planting schemes that the Minister announced just yesterday, the maintenance of those lands and any potential forestry?

Things are changing. Let us make them fit for purpose. We urgently need a new ANC scheme to give economic assurance and value to those working on our land and in our environment.

Mr Allister: No one in the House will get argument from me that our hill farmers do not make a valuable contribution to our agricultural production. However, it is imperative that we take an overview of all our agriculture because, at the end of the day, we are a food-producing region. We need to optimise that and do it in a way that respects that there is a limited pot of government money to aid that process. Therefore, it is appropriate that, from time to time, we stand back and examine whether the distribution and spend are balanced correctly or whether they need adjustment. Therefore, it was right to review the ANC payments. It is quite a preposterous proposition for the mover of the motion to say that he wants to see not only a flat rate but the advantage of an ANC for hill farmers. There is not an endless money tree. There is a need to balance where we are best helping production.

I am surprised — well, maybe I am not — that, in the debate, there has been no reference to one of the reasons why ANC was introduced in the first place. It was introduced in part to offset the curtailment that had been placed on hill farming by the EU. It is by addressing and removing some of those curtailments, such as stocking rates, that we could help hill farmers. Why should farmers not be able to set their own stocking rate on their own land? Why should they not be able to out-winter cattle on their own upland areas? Why must we have these prescriptive rates, dates and times of stocking? If we remove them, we help to restore autonomy and the possibility of success to those areas. Why do we have restrictions on the type of livestock in hill areas? Why are we not giving our farmers the freedom to farm? They control their own farms. They know what is best for their business. Take heather burning, which we banned. The ability to burn heather at the right time of the year, under the right burning conditions, would help hill farmers. It is, in part, because we took away all those rights that ANCs were imposed. By removing those EU-inspired, nonsensical, inhibiting provisions, we could, in fact, liberate our hill farmers. That would be a most useful step to take, but we did not hear a word of that today. All that we heard was the usual whining, “Give us the money. Give us the money”. It is not a sustainable situation. I hear talk about sustainable farming. Yes, sustainable farming includes making sure that the areas that are productive and making the big contribution to our farming output are not neglected. Yes, there has to be a spread and all things have to be considered, but this tunnel vision — that we need to channel more and more money away from the productive sections into the non-productive sections — is the height of nonsense.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will the Minister accept that his constituency, 35% of which is designated as a severely disadvantaged area, has very limited options for farmers? If we drive them and totally force them on productivity, it will be really challenging for those farmers. Very little can be done when dealing with mountains, hills, slopes, stony land and bad soil. Does he not accept that? It is not a case of, “Give us the money”. This is about the farmers who live on hills and in bad areas and are very hard-pressed. It is not a case of, “Give us the money”.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: First, Mr Allister has an extra minute. Secondly, I do not think that you could possibly have insulted Mr Allister any more than by referring to him as “the Minister”. He is “the Member”.

Mr Allister: What a slur, I have to say, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [*Laughter.*] I do not think that Mr McAleer has been listening. I have identified burdens that could be taken off hill farmers. Allow them to farm as they need to farm. Take away the mollycoddling restrictions and open up their opportunities. He has not addressed, thought or spoken about that at all. Are we here to help farmers, or are we here to hinder them? The ANC restrictions on farming hinder hill farmers. I say that we should liberate them and let them farm as they ought. If things are as grim as is said — things are not good in farming — this is the moment to look forward. Brexit provides the opportunity to do things differently. That is what the Minister needs to address: how can we do things not just differently but better? Simply repeating what we have rarely amounts to doing things better. Of course, there are powers. I see reference in the motion to a schedule to the Bill. Paragraph 7 in Part 2 of schedule 6 gives the Minister very wide powers. Where he considers:

“there is a severe disturbance in agricultural markets or a serious threat of a severe disturbance”

and there is a threat to protections etc —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude.

Mr Allister: — he can take monetary action to deal with that. That is the right way to go. Take the shackles off our farmers and have the safety net of the Department able to intervene when it is needed.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 1.00 pm. I, therefore, propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be the Minister, Mr Edwin Poots.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.59 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Domestic Homicide Reviews

1. **Ms Dolan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her plans to introduce domestic homicide reviews. (AQO 252/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): Worryingly, there are, on average, six domestic homicides each year in Northern Ireland, with a domestic abuse incident occurring every 17 minutes. Each domestic homicide is a tragedy, and behind every statistic there is a person with family and friends whose life has ended in traumatic circumstances. I want to do all that I can to prevent that happening in the future. I intend to introduce domestic homicide reviews locally in the autumn. A recruitment exercise to identify suitable individuals to chair the domestic homicide reviews will be finalised in the coming weeks. Once the chairs are appointed, we will ensure that they have access to a period of appropriate training before commencing the reviews. The chairs will work alongside a multi-agency panel to see what issues can be learnt from those tragic cases to prevent future abuse and deaths. It is hoped that the reviews will begin during the autumn.

Ms Dolan: I thank the Minister for her answer. It is an issue that has affected my constituency. Paragraph 6.10 of the consultation document on domestic homicide reviews (DHRs) states that the Department does not intend the DHRs to cover death by suicide. Concerns about that have been raised by a number of bodies, including the Attorney General and the Policing Board. Will the Minister commit to including death by suicide within the remit of domestic homicide reviews?

Mrs Long: Submitting suicide to a domestic homicide review is complex because, for such a review to take place, the case must have gone to court. Therefore, it can be very difficult, unless it can be proved that coercion or force was involved in the suicide, for that to happen. Homicide suicide cases will be used for refinement purposes as we develop the tools for domestic homicides, and they will be included when they are introduced. However, a suicide on its own would not be appropriate for a homicide review, simply because it will not have gone through the court system.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the introduction of the domestic homicide reviews. Minister, can you inform the House whether there will be opportunities for learning from other jurisdictions and best practice? How will research be incorporated in the review?

Mrs Long: We are aware that domestic homicide reviews are happening in other regions. That is one of the reasons why we have decided to introduce them here. They were originally introduced in England and Wales in 2011, under section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crimes and Victims Act 2004. That legislation also provides for Northern

Ireland in the form of a commencement order. We hope to bring that forward in the autumn.

In terms of learning, it is important that the thematic report is published every two years to reflect on what has been delivered and to highlight improvements in practice. That will also be critical in preventing future offending. Furthermore, it will, hopefully, bring learning to the justice partners that are first responders or those who, potentially, engage with families ahead of such tragic circumstances.

Mr Chambers: Given that deaths while under the care of the Health Service are reviewed by those responsible for that care — the hyponatremia deaths are a prime example — does the Minister believe that there is a place for our justice system in those morbidity reviews?

Mrs Long: The issue of hyponatremia falls well outside the scope of a question about domestic homicide. It would be for the Minister of Health to take forward any investigation in that regard.

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for the answers provided to this point. Will she outline the timescales for the introduction of the domestic abuse Bill?

Mrs Long: The intention is that we will bring the domestic abuse Bill to the Committee ahead of Easter recess. With a fair wind, that should happen because we are just waiting for the Office of the Legislative Counsel to sign off on the Bill. It should then go through the Executive process, and, hopefully, it will be with the Committee ahead of recess.

After that, it will really be in the hands of the Executive, the Committee and the Assembly as to how quickly we are able to progress it.

I am very keen to see the Bill introduced as quickly as possible. There is a commencement period required in order for us to have training in place for justice partners who will be delivering on the issues. As we have discussed with other jurisdictions, that can take up to a year, but we have spent some time talking to other partners about how we can reduce some of the delay so that we can make the domestic abuse legislation operational at as early a juncture as possible.

Antisocial Behaviour

2. **Ms Mullan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the actions carried out following the review of antisocial behaviour legislation in 2018. (AQO 253/17-22)

Mrs Long: Tackling antisocial behaviour and the negative impact that that type of behaviour has on communities is a priority for the Executive. That is reflected in the current draft Programme for Government, which outlines our commitment to improving community safety by tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB) through a review of legislation.

My Department carried out a consultation in 2018, inviting public opinion on a number of legislative proposals aimed at addressing antisocial behaviour, with particular emphasis on behaviours linked to the consumption of alcohol in public places. Fifty responses were received from a range of interested parties. In summary, there was broad support for consideration of additional powers to deal with noise nuisance, seizure or confiscation of alcohol in designated places and the closure of premises, both residential and business, associated with disorder or nuisance. Opinions were more divided on the introduction

of criminal behaviour orders, which replaced antisocial behaviour orders, on conviction in England and Wales, and public spaces protection orders, which provide powers for local authorities to deal with nuisance or problem behaviour by imposing conditions on the use of public areas.

A full summary of responses was published on the Department's website in December 2019. A recurring theme from respondents was the requirement of any additional information to inform further consideration of future legislative proposals and the requirement for a swift and effective multi-agency response to nuisance and inconsiderate behaviour.

My officials have commenced a scoping exercise to identify how successful some of the proposed legislative changes have been in England and Wales. They are setting up a multi-agency working group to consider the findings from the consultation, as well as an evidence base in managing an operational response to antisocial behaviour. That will include considering whether there is sufficient legislation in place and whether additional powers are necessary. I recognise the benefits of non-legislative approaches, so work is also under way with key partners who lead on operational responses through ASB forums to better connect strategic policies and operational work in order to improve the delivery of targeted early intervention in local areas.

Ms Mullan: I thank the Minister for her answer. You touched on this, but can you identify the stakeholders that your Department is engaging with at a community level that are most impacted on by persistent antisocial behaviour?

Mrs Long: We have engaged with stakeholders in a number of ways, such as through the Northern Ireland safe community survey, previously the Northern Ireland crime survey. It asked people about their perceptions of crime, so we have had direct contact with the public. We are also working with other partners, including policing and community safety partnerships, the police, and community and voluntary sector organisations. We are working with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on its community safety strategy. We are also looking at the draft policing plan, particularly at the police's work on their crime prevention strategies.

Mr Muir: Does the Minister agree that tackling antisocial behaviour requires not just legislation but a multi-agency response? What work is being done to deliver that multi-agency response?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. It picks up where the previous question left off. We need a multi-agency response in a number of areas and across different Departments. For example, alcohol issues are persistently raised, and I am working with the Department for Communities on looking at the issues around seizure. We want to ensure that there are alternative solutions. Improving the operation of current council by-laws, for example, would make them more effective. The Department of Justice has introduced a penalty notice scheme that allows fixed penalties to be issued for a number of public order offences, including public drunkenness, disorderly behaviour and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace.

In addition, the work of community safety partnerships is hugely important. Their local plans include measures and initiatives such as community safety wardens, educational

programmes, engagement and diversionary programmes, and intergenerational programmes to try to address local concerns in areas where antisocial behaviour is an issue.

Mr Dunne: The Minister will be fully aware of the problem of group antisocial behaviour, especially in our town centres. As we look forward to better weather and the longer summer evenings, will the Minister advise what initiatives, following the recent review, she will implement to try to address the problem?

Mrs Long: The Member highlights a particular issue that tends to happen with increasing warm weather and more people spending time outside. It should be an opportunity for people to enjoy the environment around them, but many of us will know — the Member will have had experience of this in his constituency — of the impact that drinking can have, particularly when it comes to the enjoyment of the coast.

In terms of initiatives, we need to look at how we can work in partnership with others. There is an issue in that police do not have the power to seize open canisters of alcohol or open containers that previously contained alcohol. There have been attempts to address that through legislation, but we have been advised that those attempts, if enacted, would not be successful or effective in tackling the issue.

So it is about collaborative working between the Department of Justice, the Department for Communities and local councils to ensure that we review the by-laws, look at how they are implemented and enforced and look at where additional legislation might be necessary to provide them with the back-up required. It is also important that we continue to work with others, including Youth Service, to try to deflect young people away from risk-taking behaviour, because it is not only a nuisance to others in the community, it places young people at risk of harm. It can place them in danger and make them quite vulnerable. So it is important that we try to take a proactive approach to ensure that young people are protected, as well as local communities.

Mr McGrath: Nothing challenges antisocial behaviour more than police on the streets. There can be a perception at times that there are not enough police on the streets or that they are never seen. There has been a promise of additional officers, especially for the community beat team. I made reference to that yesterday, so I ask the Minister again when those new officers will be on the ground.

Mrs Long: The deployment of police resources on the ground is a matter for the Chief Constable, and the question would be best directed towards him. There are additional officers being made available, and the police have been clear to the Policing Board that it is their intention to use those officers to strengthen community policing teams, not just in order to tackle antisocial behaviour but to help with cooperation within communities and build the kind of strong relationships between police and the communities that are absolutely essential if we are to create a culture of lawfulness and assist the police in the work that they do to keep people safe.

Mr Speaker: Questions 5 and 12 have been grouped.

Gillen Review: Recommendations

3. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Gillen review of civil and family justice. (AQO 254/17-22)

Mrs Long: The modernisation of the civil and family justice system is one of a number of significant reforms being progressed by the Department. As the Gillen review recognised, the civil and family justice system has not been subjected to fundamental change for some years, and substantial reform will take time and require considerable contributions from a range of partners, including other Departments and the judiciary.

We have made a good start, though with limited resources. Our focus has been primarily on family law, and we have made good progress in a number of areas. That includes piloting a family drug and alcohol court, working in partnership to improve the experience of litigants in person in the court system and, in the domestic abuse Bill, progressing legislation to protect victims of abuse from being directly cross-examined by the perpetrator. I intend to build on that good start over the coming months.

Mr Givan: I welcome the progress being made, particularly in respect of family law. One aspect that I would like to see taken forward is the standardised fee approach for legal aid, which took place in criminal law. It would be good to see that taking place on the civil side.

Within the recommendations made by Gillen, there was an area that he touched on when it came to how court cases were being communicated and public access to the gallery. There were submissions that were made in respect of that from the Bar Council, including that defendants should have the right to remain anonymous until the point at which conviction takes place.

Is that an area that, the Minister believes, should be taken forward by way of granting anonymity to defendants until the point at which they are convicted and found guilty? Otherwise, we will look at the approach taken in the Republic of Ireland to handling these types of serious sexual offences cases.

2.15 pm

Mrs Long: A bit like Claire Sugden when she suggested that the Department of Justice tends to be the place where people go when things go wrong, I think that Justice Gillen also became that person. You are referring to a second review that Sir John Gillen did on sexual offences and crimes.

There is an issue about anonymity. Clearly, we value the open and transparent nature of the court system, but it is important that victims and, indeed, those who are accused of crimes are given protection, particularly in those very sensitive areas. It is a balanced conversation, because there has also been evidence that, when the names of perpetrators and alleged perpetrators are made known, other victims will often come forward, so to not disclose their name and who they are can be a barrier to other people coming forward. That is still under consideration by the Department, and no final decision has been made.

Mr Allister: If the Minister is taking questions on the second review, I will ask her this. I urge her not to rush

to blind acceptance of everything that is in that report, because, I suggest to her, there is one aspect in particular — maybe more than one — that sits antithetically with a fair process in a trial. I refer to the suggestion that we should move to a point where the cross-examination of an accused is subject to all questions being approved by the judge. Cross-examination is critical in separating the wheat from the chaff in a case. It cannot be scripted. It is answer-led and, therefore, should not be judge-led. Will she carefully consider the adverse impact on a fair judicial process if we get to the point where cross-examination is fettered in the way suggested?

Mrs Long: I reassure Mr Allister that there is no intention on my part to rush to judgement without giving the issues careful consideration. The importance of a fair trial and a fair hearing is absolutely crucial and is at the heart of the justice system. There are, however, examples that people can refer to of people being asked questions that perpetuate rape myths: for example, people are questioned about their previous sexual behaviour or about what they wore. Those are myths that, as a society, we have spent a long time trying to unpick. In those cases, in the same way that it would not be permitted to refer to people's family or caring responsibilities during a job interview, it is absolutely right that we should have boundaries within which people can be questioned, particularly when it comes to questioning and cross-examining witnesses who, in these cases, may also be a victim of crime. It is important that those who are involved in these cases are trained specifically for that role. That includes those who act in defence of those who are accused as well as those who are prosecuting in the system.

Ms Anderson: Minister, I want to ask you primarily about the proceedings that allow for perpetrators to question victims in family courts. You said that you would ban that some time soon, but do you have a time frame? Also, do you have any policy specific to parental alienation? You said yesterday that it would not be in the domestic violence Bill, but will there be specific policies? La Dolce Vita Project is keen to hear whether there will be policies relating to this.

Mrs Long: I know that the Member has been working with the La Dolce Vita Project for some time. They have also corresponded with me about their concerns. The issue of parental alienation is gaining increasing recognition in the family courts. I think that we also recognise that, in cases where there is domestic abuse, particularly coercive control, children can often be used and abused in order to effect some kind of ongoing control and contact with the victim that is unwelcome. It is important that those in the family court system are alert to the risks of people coming into contact with people in the family courts, whether they are there as a result of stalking offences or as a result of domestic abuse.

As I said to the Member previously when questioned about this, the issue of domestic abuse will cover coercive control. Parental alienation is a form of coercive control in a family. It will also bring forward an aggregating factor to be considered around children being involved in those offences. There is a real opportunity for issues of parental alienation to be dealt with in the domestic violence Bill whilst it is not listed as a specific offence. Raising awareness is also hugely important to those who work as justice partners in the system.

Helen's Law

4. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Justice what plans her Department has to introduce Helen's law in Northern Ireland. (AQO 255/17-22)

Mrs Long: I refer the Member to the answer that I provided in response to his recent question for written answer by way of background. The Prisoners (Disclosure of Information about Victims) Bill, known as "Helen's law" in England and Wales is before Parliament. It has been called "Helen's law" as the outcome of a long-running campaign by Helen McCourt's mother. Helen was murdered in 1998, and her body was never recovered. Her mother has campaigned to include provisions as a statutory duty on the Parole Board in England and Wales to consider the non-disclosure of the whereabouts of victims' remains as part of its assessment of consideration of release of prisoners where the board believes that the prisoner has access to such information.

Mr Easton: I understand that the families of Charlotte Murray and Lisa Dorrian have been in contact about trying to introduce such a law for Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that those families have been through far too much pain, suffering and anguish and that those who are responsible for those murders, whether they have been convicted or will be in the future, should not get out of jail until such times as they reveal where people's loved ones are?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for raising those issues. Obviously, I am aware of the tragic case of Lisa Dorrian, and I have every sympathy with Charlotte Murray's family. I am aware of their desire to see the law changed, as is proposed for England and Wales. I will meet Charlotte Murray's family soon and will consider the issue further in the light of the passage of the Bill. I know that Sinead Corrigan, Charlotte's sister, has begun a campaign, has been very active in petitioning and now has over 3,000 signatures in support. I will, hopefully, meet the family on 11 March and will then be able to consider further whether such legislation is required in Northern Ireland.

Ms Dillon: I welcome the Minister's confirming that she will meet the families, because that is very important. In your short time as Minister, you have been very proactive in meeting victims about all the issues. That can only be positive.

Obviously, an element of Helen's law relates to sentencing. Could that be encompassed by the sentencing review?

Mrs Long: I want to say a couple of things on that. In circumstances where someone has been murdered and sentencing takes place, obviously, it is a matter for the judge to make a judgement on what they decide to do. Where they issue a life sentence and then make a tariff decision, they take account of the circumstances in the individual case, which would include any aggravating or mitigating factors, including the impact on the family. Aggravating factors can increase the length of the tariff, which is the term that is served before someone can apply for parole. That is an issue for consideration in that.

In the case of Charlotte's murder, when the judge made his sentencing remarks, he said that he regarded the devastating impact of the family's not knowing where her body was as:

"the most serious aggravating feature of this case",

so it was taken into account in sentencing. It is important that it continues to be so.

Mr Butler: The murderers of Captain Robert Nairac GC are still on the run in the US. Can the Minister confirm whether, if Helen's law were brought in in Northern Ireland, those individuals, if arrested, would not be released under licence as per the Belfast Agreement unless they gave the location of Robert's remains?

Mrs Long: First and foremost, it would not be appropriate for me to prejudge whether Helen's law will be introduced, because we have not made a decision on it. It is still under consideration. When it comes to sentencing, the provisions in the 1998 Act are already set out. It would be a matter for the Northern Ireland Office to change the 1998 Act in order to bring in what the Member suggests as part of the general sentencing guidelines. I am happy to write to the Member with clarification of which legislation would apply in those specific circumstances. I know that those cases would be treated under the 1998 Act, which led to the early release of prisoners.

Mr McGlone: I am trying to tease out that issue of tariffs. You said that it was for the judiciary to determine tariffs, including full-life tariffs, but there is also the issue of parole where a person convicted of murder has not disclosed the location of the victim's body, which falls within the remit of DOJ. First, is the Minister prepared to change the legislation on the tariffs that are implemented by the courts? Secondly, will parole be made unavailable to persons who have not disclosed the whereabouts of their victim's body in circumstances where they have been convicted of murder?

Mrs Long: The Member is correct in identifying that there are two places in the system where aggravating factors such as non-disclosure of victims' remains can be considered. The first is at the point of tariff setting, where the judge makes a decision on the earliest point in a sentence at which a life prisoner can apply for parole. Obviously, that is often not the point at which life prisoners are released. They must go through a robust pre-release programme and pass pre-release testing before consideration. Therefore, somebody who has a tariff that appears quite short might, if they fail those tests, end up serving quite a long sentence. That will be covered by the sentencing review, where there is the opportunity to look at the wider frame of sentencing. We have not reached conclusions on the outcome of that, but the responses to the sentencing review are being collated and will be considered.

The Parole Commissioners, in considering the release of prisoners on licence, will assess all of the information in relation to the offence, and, where an offender has refused to reveal the location of the victim's remains, they are able to take that into account. That is already the case. Effectively, the legislation in England and Wales places our current parole board practice on a statutory footing, but it does not place a duty on the board to deny release until a person identifies the location of a victim's remains; it simply requires the board to take it into account before making a decision on the point at which to parole a prisoner.

Driving Offences: Sentencing

5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any changes she intends to make to sentences for those convicted of driving offences that cause death or serious injury. (AQO 256/17-22)

12. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice whether she has any plans to review sentencing for driving under the influence of drink or drugs. (AQO 263/17-22)

Mrs Long: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will take questions 5 and 12 together.

The recent consultation on sentencing included driving offences resulting in death or serious injury, including those as a result of careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs. A number of questions were posed, including whether the current maximum of 14 years should increase to a maximum of life or 20 years. As mentioned on 17 February in answer to a previous question, the consultation closed on 3 February, with over 200 responses received. The majority of responses related to sentencing for serious driving offences. The responses are being analysed, with a view to a report this spring.

It may assist Members if I make clear, however, that responsibility for road traffic legislation lies with the Department for Infrastructure, and questions about any wider review of sentencing for driving offences should be directed to the Minister for that Department, Nichola Mallon. A wider policy review of sentencing for driving under the influence of drink or drugs would be a matter for her, and her Department would be responsible for developing policy in that area.

Mr McAleer: I take the opportunity to commend the family of young Enda Dolan, who was killed in an accident a number of years ago. The family have been campaigning relentlessly for appropriate sentences for those convicted of killing people in such circumstances. Does the Minister agree that it will be important that, if any sentencing changes are to come about, the punishment must fit the crime and act as a deterrent, particularly in situations where no remorse is shown?

Mrs Long: First, I join the Member in paying tribute to the family of Enda Dolan. Enda's death is one that sticks in most people's mind. It was an absolutely horrific incident. I had the honour of spending time with the family recently when they came to meet me to discuss their concerns about the sentencing in that case and about how sentences are constructed.

Their desire is to see sentencing as clear, open and transparent as possible and to ensure that victims' families can understand the sentencing, understand how it is calculated and be confident that the sentencing fits the crime. I know that their concerns in relation to that are significant.

They have already — and I commend them for this — through their campaign and feedback on their experience, changed elements of the justice system. For example, now it is routine that families have the sentence described to them before they enter the court for the actual sentencing so that they are not caught off guard, surprised or confused by how the sentences are described in court, because it can be a very upsetting experience for families who are sitting in a confusing, highly emotional situation

to then hear very complex explanations as to why the sentence has been arrived at.

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

Community Policing: DOJ Investment

T1. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the investment that she will be able to make in community policing. (AQT 181/17-22)

Mrs Long: As the Member is aware, investment in policing and the management of resources in the PSNI is entirely a matter for the Chief Constable. However, like all Departments, I am currently in negotiations with the Finance Minister on the settlement for the coming year. That will include money for policing, which is a large part of my budget. Around 70% of the Department of Justice's budget is spent on policing, but how that is disbursed and spent in the Police Service is entirely a matter for the Chief Constable.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for her response. Can I seek assurances from the Minister that, through her engagement with the PSNI, the amount of money that she has sought for policing has been, in some way, prioritised to be directed towards community policing?

Mrs Long: Again, it is for the Chief Constable to decide on the police's priorities when deploying their resources. Undoubtedly, he is already on record as saying that he places huge emphasis on the need for enhanced community policing and good contact in communities. I imagine that, dependent on resources, that is an area that he will want to expand on, but it will be entirely a matter for him.

Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill

T2. **Ms Dolan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her rationale for supporting the introduction in the North of the British Government's Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill. (AQT 182/17-22)

Mrs Long: There are a number of issues around the early release Bill. As you are aware, emergency legislation was brought through Westminster in recent weeks that Northern Ireland was not included in. I think that that sends out a potentially dangerous message that, in some way, for Northern Ireland, there is a two-tier system when it comes to dealing with terrorist offenders. That potentially places Northern Ireland and the public at greater risk. That Bill was brought forward in response to a particular operational need, but in the longer-term development of the legislation, departmental officials continue to engage because, whilst it is our desire that we match best practice from other jurisdictions, it is also important that we have systems that are operable within and sensitive to the Northern Ireland context.

Ms Dolan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Human rights organisations have expressed grave concern at this law. Will the Minister take account of those concerns?

Mrs Long: Issues around human rights are always at the top of our agenda when it comes to how we deal with people who offend and how they are treated in the system. In particular, concern was expressed about the emergency legislation and provisions about retrospectivity in relation

to sentences. Ultimately, the main duty in looking at those issues is around public protection, but I do not believe that public protection is aided if people are under the impression that their human rights are being abused. It is important that a correct balance is struck and that we give due consideration to all the factors, including whether or not people's human rights are being respected in the system.

Stalking: Legislation

T3. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on legislation to create an offence of stalking in Northern Ireland, given the devastating impact that it has on victims. (AQT 183/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. As he will be aware, we have fallen somewhat behind some other jurisdictions on the issue of stalking. On the basis of the policy development that has taken place here so far, I intend to introduce a stalking Bill in the autumn. It will introduce a specific offence of stalking and take into account the effect that multiple incidents have on a person. At the moment, stalking has to be prosecuted under harassment law, and it can often be difficult for victims to meet the threshold. The Bill will also introduce stalking protection orders that can be initiated by the police and will therefore remove the burden that is often placed on victims under harassment law to seek non-molestation orders, which can be quite expensive and unwieldy; in fact, some victims have found that the perpetrators in such circumstances pursue them by trying to alter non-molestation orders to maintain contact with them through the courts.

Mr Stalford: I welcome the answer that the Minister has given and am grateful to her for it. The sexual harassment of women involving mobile phones has become an increasing problem in our society. Will the Minister outline some of the proposals that she has to tackle those outrageous assaults on women?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for that. It is important, on two fronts, that we tackle online crime, particularly the kind of assaults that the Member has spoken about. Whether it is revenge porn, upskirting or anything else, I am committed to ensuring that the law provides the most effective protection for victims of that kind of crime. It is my intention to bring forward legislative proposals on amendments to sexual offences law, including amendments to the law on voyeurism that will make upskirting a specific offence. I want to bring that legislation to the Assembly in a justice Bill that we plan to introduce in early 2021.

Domestic Abuse: Safe Accommodation

T4. **Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Justice whether she intends to introduce a statutory duty to provide safe accommodation for victims and survivors of domestic abuse here, similar to that which is included in the British Domestic Abuse Bill. (AQT 184/17-22)

Mrs Long: The statutory duty to provide accommodation falls to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and lies with the Department for Communities. We would want to work in partnership with other parts of government to ensure that those who seek protection from domestic violence can secure accommodation. As the Member will be aware, it can be a very traumatic experience for

someone to build up the courage to leave a relationship or home circumstance. Often, if they fail at the first hurdle, they will not pluck up the courage to find the opportunity again. It is vital that proper accommodation and wrap-around support be provided for victims and their families in the first instance so that people can escape abusive and often very dangerous relationships.

Mr McHugh: Minister, is there an intention on your part or through working with other Departments to engage with Women's Aid?

Mrs Long: Women's Aid, the Men's Advisory Project, NIACRO, Nexus and lots of other organisations are hugely important partners for us in developing the initial offences and the legislation and in how we manage offenders after release to ensure that people are protected during the time that somebody is serving time for an offence and when that person is released back into the community.

A huge amount of work needs to be done on upskilling first responders to be aware of the impact of stalking and domestic violence and, in particular, to note the signs of coercive control at the earliest possible stage. That training is ongoing. In answer to an earlier question, I referenced the need for the training to be comprehensive so that, when we operationalise the offences, our justice partners are in a good place to ensure that they are effective and provide the correct level of protection for people and families in those circumstances.

Abortion Services: Anti-harassment Measures

T5. **Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the UN CEDAW report that recommended that women be protected from harassment by anti-abortion protesters by investigating complaints and prosecuting and punishing the perpetrators, and the fact that the recent NIO consultation on abortion regulations stated that new powers may be required in Northern Ireland to allow for the proactive designation of exclusion zones so that the women and girls who are accessing those services and the health professionals who work in the facilities can feel safe, secure and free from harassment and intimidation, whether she will introduce such powers. (AQT 185/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for her question. It is very timely, because I have raised this with the Northern Ireland Office. It would be its responsibility under the recent Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 to introduce such protections as part of the overall approach. The Member has been involved in this issue long enough to know that not everyone in the Chamber, and not all parties, share her view when it comes to the issue of protection zones around clinics.

However, I fundamentally believe that, while people have a right to protest, they do not have a right to interfere with other people's ability to access services and travel back and forward to a clinic that is offering either advice or medical services that are legal and permissible for patients. Managing protest in a constructive way, to allow freedom of expression but not to interfere with the free passage of others, is absolutely crucial in this legislation being effective.

Ms Bailey: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she let us know how many reports of harassment and intimidation

by anti-abortion protesters have been received to date? What are the numbers of subsequent investigations and prosecutions?

Mrs Long: I would have to write to the Member with statistics for that. I omitted to say in my original answer that I met Robin Walker, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, to ask him specifically about this issue, which still falls to the Department of Justice in terms of implementation. As you know, with the decriminalisation of abortion, other regulations in that respect have moved to the direct lead of Health. However, exclusion zones and how they are policed and managed will fall to the Department of Justice in due course.

Magilligan Prison: Update

T6. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the business case for the rebuild of Magilligan prison in his constituency. (AQT 186/17-22)

Mrs Long: I would be delighted to do so and I will be in a position, hopefully, to have it reinforced to me how important that is because I will be visiting Magilligan tomorrow. I hope to see at first hand the work being done there. It has already been brought to my attention by the head of Prison Service how important it is that the prison is substantially rebuilt. That is one of the issues for which we have made capital bids, so that we can take that business case forward and develop proper plans. In due course, the prison will be built. We are absolutely committed to maintaining a prison at the site of Magilligan.

Mr Robinson: Does the Minister agree that staff and inmates require a new prison after asbestos was found in prison buildings?

Mrs Long: It is absolutely crucial that the prison estate is fit for purpose. It also needs to reflect the kind of work now done in the prison system. It is no longer simply about locking people up, but about providing people with opportunities for rehabilitation, education and gaining new skills, and, hopefully, setting them on the right course so that we challenge them in the prison system to turn their lives around when they come out. The Member is of course correct that it is also the working environment of those who work in the Prison Service, and therefore it is absolutely crucial that buildings are fit for purpose. They should also be respectable buildings in which people can feel proud of the work they do.

Domestic Violence

T7. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the domestic violence perpetrators' pilot scheme in Derry's courts, which was suspended because of uptake, given that, in April 2019, he was told that more research would be done. (AQT 187/17-22)

Mrs Long: I am afraid I do not have an update for the Member at this time, but I am happy to get one and write to him.

Mr Lynch: The Department has funded the Probation Board to deliver a pilot scheme for behavioural change of individuals who have not reached the criminal justice system but who show concerning behaviours. Can the Minister outline any plans she has for the roll-out of this programme?

Mrs Long: The programme to which the Member refers is a pilot scheme that will test effectiveness. In the early stages, it appears to be working well, in that those who have not been forced to take these corrective courses are much more open to engaging with the system than those who are, for example, offered it as part of their sentencing structure.

We need to wait until the pilot has been fully assessed before any roll-out. We undoubtedly need to look at it because we want to deflect as many people away from the justice system and offending as possible. If we can help people to build better patterns of relationships and safer family units, and to be able to take care of each other more appropriately, that is for the good of everybody concerned.

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

We move now to questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Questions 6 and 8 have been grouped.

2.45 pm

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mobuoy Dump: Mills Review

1. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the regulatory and oversight reforms made by his Department and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in response to the Mills review. (AQO 267/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): The oversight reforms made by my Department in response to the Mills review are as follows: our compliant waste sector is now a corporate priority for the Department; a comprehensive operational waste strategy is being developed; structural change has been implemented with the creation of a new single directorate within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, bringing together existing regulatory and enforcement teams along with the new intelligence unit; a joint local and central government waste working group has been established with councils to support the more effective handling of municipal waste; and staff skills and professional development have been improved, with a robust induction and technical development framework in place.

The regulatory reforms made by the Department in response to the Mills review are as follows: a new compliance assessment model is in use for licensed and permanent sites, which has resulted in improved compliance levels; a number of waste regulations have been introduced or amended, providing the Department with additional powers controlling waste, transport documentation and treatment activities; the fit and proper person requirements for holders of waste authorisations has been revised; technical qualifications have been enhanced; a broader range of offences is now prescribed; and a review of activities exempt from food waste management licensing was carried out, and regulations have been amended to reduce the risk of abuse by operators.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Minister give us his assessment of the reforms and whether they have been effective in preventing any further incidents of illegal dumping?

Mr Poots: They are certainly more robust. One can never be absolutely certain that people will not try to cheat the system, because there will always be individuals, particularly where considerable amounts of money can be made — considerable amounts of money can be made from this — who continue to try to cheat the system. Nonetheless, the regulations have been strengthened considerably, and we are committed to ensuring that people do not get away with these misdemeanours.

Mr Durkan: The Minister mentioned the “fit and proper person” criteria. Will he elaborate on those criteria and outline what steps the Department has taken to make sure that someone who might have been connected to a company that was involved in misdemeanours and crime cannot become a director of a new company and get contracts and licences?

Mr Poots: Any person, or company, who has previously been charged will be easily identifiable. In these processes, there are a series of things, which include the financial fitness to carry out such operations. This programme is in place to ensure that fit and proper persons comply.

Coastal Erosion

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on his Department’s work with the Department for Infrastructure on coastal erosion. (AQO 268/17-22)

Mr Poots: The coastal forum has enabled my Department to collaborate and develop strong links with the Department for Infrastructure on coastal erosion risk management issues. The two Departments commissioned a baseline study and gap analysis of coastal erosion risk, which was published in January 2019. The study collated existing data relating to coastal erosion and undertook a high-level vulnerability assessment. However, the primary conclusion from this assessment was that there is insufficient data, and the results must be considered as preliminary and of insufficient reliability to inform coastal management decision-making. The report made recommendations on how to improve the evidence base, and these have informed the draft coastal work programme. As part of this project proposal is in preparation for a comprehensive shoreline survey and vulnerability assessment, the coastal forum has also prepared a position statement to assist councils with their consideration of coastal change when preparing local development plans.

In addition to collaboration between my Department and the Department for Infrastructure, the coastal forum and its associated working group have provided an opportunity for collaboration with councils and organisations, such as the National Trust, Ulster University, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland. That collective expertise and desire to collaborate on the challenging issue of coastal erosion risk management is becoming very constructive.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome the establishment of the coastal forum. I also declare an interest as a member of the Ards

peninsula coastal erosion group. The group has two objectives: first, to see a replacement of the so-called Bateman formula with a fit-for-purpose policy from the Executive; and, secondly, to have either the Minister’s Department or the Department for Infrastructure take on the role as the lead and coordinating Department for the Government’s engagement in coastal management. Does the Minister support those two objectives?

Mr Poots: Yes, the Bateman formula was introduced and endorsed in 1967 by the then secretary to the Ministry of Finance, Sir Cecil Bateman. It ruled that assets along the coastline would be looked after by the respective Department or landowner whose responsibilities most closely coincided with the property or asset at risk from erosion, which clearly has a weakness about it. The Coast Protection Act 1949 did not extend to Northern Ireland, so there was no legislation in place in Northern Ireland to specifically address coastal erosion or assign responsibility for it. Instead, for the past 53 years, it has been addressed through the Bateman formula.

The approach is essentially a coastal protection policy rather than a coastal erosion risk management strategy, and the objective is simply the protection of property, with no requirement to consider the consequences of implementing and maintaining coastal protection. Bateman does not require a joined-up or strategic approach as a consequence. So there has been a lack of leadership on coastal erosion risk management and no coordinated strategy to consider and address coastal erosion in Northern Ireland. It is important that our two Departments, DFI and DAERA, work closely together to get into the coastal erosion issue.

Mr Dunne: We welcome the work that has been done to date on coastal erosion, but there are issues, especially with the high spring tides that we are having and the continual flooding relating to further erosion. What further work has the Minister done to identify funding for councils and other agencies to address the ongoing problem of coastal erosion, especially in areas like north Down and, indeed, Ards?

Mr Poots: The coast forms part of a highly dynamic system. As such, it will be subject periodically to the natural process of coastal erosion. That is particularly true of the sandy beaches and dune systems that are prevalent and that we are fortunate to have in many parts of Northern Ireland. The management of any given area will depend upon a range of factors, such as nature and value of the site at risk, the coastal process that is affecting it and the area’s nature conservation interests. It is those factors that will influence the most appropriate response, from non-intervention through to the construction of coastal defences. It is difficult to define best practice, recommended methodologies and materials to be used as they will differ depending on the circumstances. My Department, as the marine licensing authority, receives applications for construction and development proposals up to the high-water mark. It will consider the factors that I mentioned in the pre-application and licensing processes and will provide that guidance on the environmental information or reports that are required to support such an application.

Mr McNulty: I had an interesting response from the Assembly’s RaISe last week when an answer came from the head of marine planning that related to Armagh’s

coastline between the Victoria Lock on the Omeath Road and the border, close to Davey's pub. Is the Minister aware that County Armagh has a coastline?

Mr Poots: I am not as familiar as the Member with County Armagh, but I know that it is bounded by County Down, County Louth, County Tyrone — and there is one more, is there not?

Mr Buckley: Lough Neagh.

Mr Poots: Lough Neagh. *[Laughter.]* I know that it is not on the sea coast. I do not know how that happened, so I am not able to explain it.

Mr Speaker: Good try.

Ms Ennis: During yesterday's debate on afforestation, the Minister spoke about the light detection and ranging (LIDAR) survey and technology. Does he have any plans to use the LIDAR survey to assess coastal erosion and use the technology for its prevention?

Mr Poots: LIDAR is a very useful tool. We intend to use it to identify where run-off goes into coastal waters. If it can help us to tackle coastal erosion, we should utilise it. If we can gain further benefits from it, as opposed to using it just for water management, I will be happy to look at that.

Slurry Spreading: Regulations

3. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of the effectiveness of regulations governing the spreading of slurry or other materials on farmland. (AQO 269/17-22)

Mr Poots: I thank the independent Member for Lagan Valley for his question. He is looking very well in the corner there.

The current nutrient actions programme (NAP) regulations for the period 2019-2022 implement a range of controls on livestock manures and chemical fertilisers. In Northern Ireland, NAP has been in place since 2007. It is reviewed and revised every four years and applies to all farms. The measures are underpinned by scientific evidence, including local research by the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute.

Key measures include a closed period during the winter months, when slurry cannot be spread, and no spreading when soil and weather conditions are unsuitable. There are limits to how much slurry can be spread. There are non-spread zones beside waterways and a minimum slurry storage capacity requirement for livestock farms. The NAP for 2019-2022 includes additional measures. These aim to address pressures on water quality, particularly for increasing phosphorus levels, which have been evident over recent years. Other measures include a requirement to use low-emission slurry spreading equipment in certain circumstances.

The most recent water quality data indicates that the vast majority of surface freshwater and groundwater in Northern Ireland continues to have nitrate levels well below the limits in the EU nitrates directive. However, excess phosphorus is the main cause of water quality problems in our rivers and lakes. My Department recognises the good work done by farmers since the NAP was introduced in 2007. Soil phosphorus is, however, often above the agronomic optimum, so there is more work to be done

on reducing phosphorus inputs from livestock feeds and chemical fertilisers. Ensuring best practice and compliance with the NAP measures will reduce the risk of phosphorus run-off in the waterways.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for that very comprehensive answer. I have no problem with the regulations, but I have some problems with their enforcement. Does he agree that the punishment for careless, or even illegal, behaviour or transgression of the regulations should fit the crime and, perhaps, should be greater than is currently the case?

Mr Poots: That is a matter for the courts. The courts are independent of the Department, and the Department, through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) will take the prosecutions. The NIEA is not the prosecutor and cannot determine what punishments people will get. Some people have said that that situation demonstrates the need for an independent agency, but it is the courts that make those decisions, not an independent agency, not the NIEA and not the Department or anybody else. If we are not satisfied, that needs to be addressed with the Lord Chief Justice as opposed to a political Minister.

Ms Sheerin: I spoke at length earlier about the different challenges faced by farmers. Another factor that makes life difficult for farmers is the calendar. Does the Minister envisage that his Department will have any additional flexibility on the precise timing of the open and closed seasons for slurry spreading?

Mr Poots: The nitrates directive was brought in by the European Union, which has a great way of applying blunt instruments to local problems.

I would prefer to apply local solutions to local problems.

3.00 pm

February was wholly unsuitable for spreading slurry, except for three or four days at the start of the month, whilst January was an exceptionally good month and ideal for spreading slurry. We want to test this and see what latitude we have. Given that we are still locked into European Union directives as a result of the protocol, we want to see where we can stretch this. Farming by a calendar works only in an office in Brussels. It does not work in a field in County Tyrone, County Londonderry or County Down.

Mr Stewart: It is essential that farmers have the flexibility to spread slurry at times that are suitable. We have many small farms and, subsequently, many fields with plenty of hedges and open drains. Are the new measures, such as increasing buffer zones from 15 to 30 metres, making things slightly more unworkable?

Mr Poots: Of course it will make it more difficult. If you have a small field, the buffer can create a problem. Some drains can be dry drains, so they are less of an issue. We need to ensure that there is less pollution of waterways while maximising nutrients going into the soil. Run-off is no good for farmers or the environment. We need to match the needs. That is why we are looking at soil analysis, which can demonstrate the appropriate amount of fertiliser and organic manures that farmers need to apply without overdoing it and it ending up in waterways.

Ms Bailey: It is good to hear the Minister talk about the weather. Farming is dictated by the seasons. Climate change is messing with weather patterns, and farmers are

struggling with that. Will you be looking at slurry spreading in terms of climate change?

Mr Poots: Yes, that is certainly something that I want to look at. I have indicated to my departmental officials that things are not working as they are and we need to look at how we can change things. That will not be straightforward, but I am committed to engaging in work on that.

We have an unpredictable weather pattern, albeit that our weather seems to operate in cycles. We get cycles of dry weather followed by, generally, a longer period of wet weather. We need to make the best of it when the weather is good, and when the weather is not so good, it is not suitable to be spreading slurry.

We must give farmers a little more flexibility so that they can do a better job of protecting the environment than has been set out for us by the European Union. Consequently, we, locally, can make better decisions on this than have been handed down to us.

Sperrins Flooding: Hardship Fund

4. **Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he will introduce a hardship scheme for farmers and the wider rural community affected by flooding in the Sperrins in August 2017. (AQO 270/17-22)

Mr Poots: I am aware of the difficulties experienced by farmers and the wider rural community in the Sperrins as a result of the flooding in August 2017. As I outlined previously in response to a question, DAERA has provided a range of financial, advisory and practical support to affected farmers. The Department continues to provide support, including £500,000 to the Loughs Agency to undertake riparian fencing works in the worst-affected areas.

As regards providing support to the wider rural community, departmental officials met local stakeholders in Plumbridge to discuss community needs. My Department continues to engage in the collaborative work under way through a local growth partnership board to identify priority actions for the Sperrin district electoral area. I have received detailed briefings outlining DAERA's response to the flooding event. The Department for Communities operates a scheme of emergency financial assistance, which was introduced by the Executive on the initiative of the then Finance Minister in June 2017. Its purpose is to provide immediate financial support to households that have suffered from flooding.

Mr McHugh: I welcome the fact that some initiatives have been undertaken. When I was Mayor of Derry City and Strabane, I visited that site. I can only describe it as being like a moon landscape at the time.

To what extent has the Minister provided financial assistance directly to farmers, or is that likely to happen in the near future?

Mr Poots: The advice from officials is that the provision of a financial assistance scheme cannot be justified on value-for-money grounds, nor, given the passage of time, can a convincing justification be made on hardship grounds. However, I recognise the challenges faced by affected farmers. This will be a difficult decision for me to make, so I will carefully consider all the relevant issues surrounding

the matter before reaching a balanced position in due course.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for the consideration that he has given to the matter and for the work that has been done by his Department thus far. I know that you are taking it very seriously, Minister, and I appreciate that. Will he consider joining me in the beautiful Glenelly valley to visit a few of the farmers who are affected to see at first hand the impact that the flooding has had on that community?

Mr Poots: I will consider it. At a meeting earlier today, it was described by one of my officials as not so much a flooding incident as a landslide incident. We should be treating it as a landslide incident as opposed to a flooding incident, because large quantities of material slid down into the valley. Some of the fields were covered with over a metre of debris, and it was impossible to farm on that land until the necessary adjustments were made. That work had to be carried out at considerable cost to people who perhaps had not got the means for it.

I understand all of this. There are just over 220 cases involved here. Some were hit much harder than others. Some have subsequently benefited from environmental farming scheme grant aid, which has allowed for new fencing etc. It is one of those difficult calls that I have to give ministerial direction on, so I have to give considerable thought to it.

Mr Buckley: In 2016, severe flooding damaged considerable parts of my Upper Bann constituency, namely on the lough shore. Farmland and rural businesses were destroyed by severe floods and a rising lough level. Although I know that the Minister's Department does not control the level of the lough — that lies with the Department for Infrastructure — farmers are again looking on at increased rainfall and noticing the dangerous lough level. They are asking whether there will be ministerial coordination between DAERA and the Department for Infrastructure to ensure that the hardship and pain caused to many of those farmers does not happen again.

Mr Poots: Therein lies the problem for government, in that the first scheme is probably the most powerful one, the next scheme is just a little behind that, and so on. There has been a series of incidents beyond your own — I recall the incidents in Fermanagh a number of years back — where weather events have caused hardship. Precedent is used, of course. I need to look at all of this and give it all very serious consideration. I would like to be helpful, but we are custodians of public money, and there is only so much of it to go around. We have to be cautious in all of these matters.

Mrs Barton: Unsurprisingly, I want to speak about yet more flooding in Fermanagh. We have had prolonged periods of rain. Some of our roads have been flooded, and vehicles have had difficulty getting through to farms. Can the Minister tell me if compensation is possible for dairy farmers where, for example, the milk tanker has not been able to get to the farm for a number of days?

Mr Poots: The Department does not have a particular fund for this type of thing, so each matter has to be done on a case-by-case basis. Where genuine hardship can be demonstrated, that can be given consideration. These difficult weather events are going to continue. They are not going to go away. Therefore, we have to be cautious of just

how much public money we invest in this. We should be encouraging people to have the appropriate and adequate insurance, but I understand and accept that many insurers will not cover quite a lot of these issues.

Farmers' Income

5. Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he plans to bring forward legislation to protect farmers' income from the market strength of supermarkets and wholesalers. (AQO 271/17-22)

Mr Poots: Farmers work extremely hard to very high standards and play a vital role in producing high-quality food. The farming industry is also vital to our economy, supports tourism and contributes to rural and environmental sustainability. However, it faces severe financial pressure. Provisional estimates of farm income indicate a 25% reduction in 2019. This follows a similar level of reduction in 2018. Estimates show that most farms, notably cattle and sheep farms, have suffered. There is clearly a concern, and it is not sustainable. I strongly believe that everyone in the agri-food supply chain should share equitably in the risks and rewards. The long-term sustainability of the farming industry depends on farmers receiving a fair return for their work and produce. Encouraging and facilitating dialogue is vital to the overall success of all sectors in the supply chain. The retail and processing sectors have an important role and I have started to engage with them, and their representatives, to hear their views on helping farm businesses become more financially sustainable. For the longer term, DAERA is working to develop an agriculture policy framework that meets the industry's future needs. My officials are engaging informally with internal and external stakeholders to gather evidence on the challenges and opportunities and practical policy interventions that we can make. I hope to lay the foundations for a better-functioning supply chain in this Assembly mandate.

Ms McLaughlin: In light of that very stark fall in farm income of 23% in 2018 and 25% in 2019 and the further challenges of the UK leaving the European Union, it is a very challenging environment for farmers. They are being squeezed. What does the Minister intend to do about that?

Mr Poots: We have the Groceries Code Adjudicators (GCA) remit. It is a reserved matter and is subject to regular review. DEFRA and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published the UK Government's response to a call for evidence on extending the GCA's remit to include farmers. Analysis of the response led DEFRA and BEIS to conclude that it would not be appropriate to extend the remit of GCA at that time, which was unfortunate. The UK Government concluded that there is a significant potential to explore more targeted and proportionate approaches to support primary producers. These include the possibility of introducing mandatory written contracts in the dairy sector and mandatory carcass classification and price reporting within the sheep sector. Powers to introduce measures to support fairness in the supply chain are included in the Agriculture Bill recently introduced at Westminster. I hope to engage further with other UK Ministers on these issues in the coming months.

Mr Speaker: I call Catherine Kelly, and we have under two minutes.

Ms C Kelly: Has the Minister given any consideration to introducing legislation that will guarantee a minimum farm gate price for producers?

Mr Poots: I know that it is an aspiration that some people in the farming sector have been pressing for, but I do not think it is a realistic aspiration. I do not think it is deliverable and, consequently, it is not something that we have been pressing for. Ultimately, we live in a free trade market. We live in a global marketplace, and we compete quite well in it because of the standard and quality of our goods and our close proximity to one of the best markets that is available, which is the GB market. That is not without its challenges, and a 23% and 25% reduction in two years running is not sustainable going forward. We need to see an uplift in prices in the incoming year, and I will be challenging supermarkets and processors to ensure that farmers get a fairer cut of the profitability that remains in the food sector.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now go to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Climate Crisis: House Refurbishment

T1. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, given that it is estimated that 24,000 jobs could be created by refurbishing and retrofitting homes here, whether he agrees that that would be a worthwhile project to take on to create jobs and tackle the climate crisis. (AQT 191/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Member talks about 24,500 jobs. The question is this: who will pay for those? If it is the Assembly, where will it get the money from, and what areas will it be taken from? I have a lot of sympathy with the issue of retrofitting homes. Newer homes have tremendous ambient heat. Consequently, they use very little energy to keep warm because they retain heat so well. That is a place that we want to go to. Building regulations deal with newer houses and extensions to older houses, but there are many houses across the country for which we do not have that standard, and, consequently, there is an awful lot of heat loss. The Member raises a valid point, but the issue is this: where do we get the finance to do it?

Mr Carroll: Obviously, funds could be made available if the will were there. Will the Minister ensure that all the buildings in his Department are up to the required standard so that they do not waste energy or carbon?

Mr Poots: The Member raises an interesting point. Ballykelly was criticised earlier: it is an excellent building for heat retention. Dundonald House was mentioned: it is an appalling building for heat retention. Somebody thought that it was a wise thing to list it. The heating system is one of the most environmentally unsustainable and unfriendly systems that there are, but that is how various parts of the Department work: built heritage thinks that it is wonderful, but everybody else thinks that it is absolutely appalling. Nonetheless, I am happy to investigate that. Our staff need to be in buildings that have good, appropriate heating systems for the wintertime and proper conditions for the

summertime, when it is very warm. We need to look at all of that. Dundonald House is certainly a building that I will look at.

Wild Flower Planting Project

T2. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he would support a wild flower planting project to encourage natural ecosystems and improve biodiversity in Northern Ireland. (AQT 192/17-22)

Mr Poots: Yes. It is one of the things that I have asked about when looking at how we move beyond the current environmental farming schemes (EFS) to the next tranche. Wild flowers grow better on soils that are not so good. They excel where the soil is shallower or is more clay-ish in nature. It is a great thing to encourage wild flowers, and it is something that I would be keen to investigate further, going forward.

Mr M Bradley: The use of wild flower planting on lands across Departments would benefit insect life, which, in turn, would provide food for other insects and, most importantly, birds and, significantly, the most important insect on the planet: the bee.

Mr Poots: I agree with the Member, particularly on the importance of the honeybee. People often take for granted the work that the bee does to sustain our environment. In America, because of the growing of almonds and the extraction of milk from those almonds, they have lost around one third of the honeybee population. That has been done in the name of the environment; people drink almond milk rather than cow's milk in the name of the environment. They are actually destroying the environment. I believe that around a third of the milk that Starbucks, for example, uses is almond milk. Starbucks is damaging the environment; it is damaging the bee population because of what it is doing. It should stop using almond milk because the mites from the almonds are destroying the honeybee population.

Immigration Proposals: Local Impact

T3. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an up-to-date assessment of the potential impact that the British Government's harsh immigration proposals could have on the agriculture and fishing industries here. (AQT 193/17-22)

Mr Poots: At the minute, only around 9% of people who work in the agri-food sector would qualify under the new regulations that are being suggested. I welcome the fact that the regulations have been eased, but two sectors — one is the health and social care sector, which does not involve my Department, and the other is the agri-food sector, which does involve my Department — will be hit badly as a consequence of the regulations. That battle is not over, and it is a battle that we need to continue to have. Those two sectors in particular should have a different level than, perhaps, some of the other sectors. Perhaps, engineering and some of the other areas that people come here to work in provide better-paid jobs, so we need to look at the areas where we have a reliance on workers from other countries so that we make it possible for that to happen.

Ms S Bradley: Can the Minister advise whether he is taking into consideration, from his reading of the proposals, the reliance on seasonal workers in industries in the agriculture and fisheries sectors? Can he explain what direct lines of communication he has to the uninformed, unconcerned — perhaps, both — Prime Minister who made such proposals?

Mr Poots: I have raised it at the Executive, and the Executive are writing to the Government of the day to express their concern about the issues involved. We need to recognise that it is not just us but many places in England, Scotland and Wales that will be hit as a consequence of this. The fishing industry will be hit as a consequence of it. We need to recognise that people who have come from other countries have sustained many of our businesses and sustained our agriculture sector in that we have an excellent processing sector, much of which is made up of people who came from other countries. It is a bit of a sad reflection on our society that, although there are many jobs out there, there are still people who do not want to take them up, whilst people from eastern Europe, Portugal, East Timor, Brazil and other countries are only too glad to take up the work that is available here.

Tree Planting: Young People

T4. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, following yesterday's positive announcement about afforestation and the Department's planned initiatives, to outline how he intends to engage young people in planting more trees in Northern Ireland. (AQT 194/17-22)

Mr Poots: Our young people are very important in the whole environmental issue. Young people are talking a lot about the environment. I encourage young people not to get lifts to school but to use public transport or to walk, and that would be more effective than strikes. That is one thing that I would say.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Tut-tut.

Mr Poots: I hear the Member tut-tutting, but can she argue that it would not be better for the environment if fewer cars were sitting outside school gates with fumes coming out of them?

In any event, we will, hopefully, be joined by over 500 young people next week as we commence the programme of planting trees. We want to engage with young people and the youth population and encourage them to get more involved in our environment, in our biodiversity, in our forests and all that. That is part of the programme, and we will work with the Department of Education and others to develop it.

Mr Stalford: In 2014, there was an outbreak of sudden oak death in Belvoir forest. Some 6,500 trees covering 11 hectares had to be felled, which accounted for almost a quarter of the forest. Will the Minister join me in visiting Belvoir forest to see for himself how tree replanting can be facilitated there? I hope to engage Belvoir Park Primary School in such a project.

Mr Poots: I am very interested in anything that encourages young people to get involved. If the Member wants to pass on the details, I will give them my fullest consideration.

Rural Services

T5. **Ms Sheerin** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, given the fact that the 'NDNA' document repeatedly identifies the transformation of key services as a priority, what steps he will take to remind his and other Departments that the transformation of key services must be done in a way that complies with their rural needs duty and properly considers the needs of rural citizens. (AQT 195/17-22)

Mr Poots: That is cross-departmental and affects a wide range of Departments. The Department for Infrastructure has many responsibilities for transportation, ensuring that people who live in areas that are more challenging to reach do not lose the opportunity to go to medical appointments and that their children have reasonable access to school transport and all of those things. We all have a role to play in ensuring that the rural community, which is a vibrant and vital community in Northern Ireland, can go about its business to the best of its ability. Bearing in mind that many in that community are not well off, we need to be able to support and facilitate them, especially for their key needs.

Ms Sheerin: It is important that the Minister and the Department think about their role as a champion for rural citizens. He may not have legislative authority for health, education, housing or justice, but we need Departments to move beyond their silos. Does he agree?

Mr Poots: Absolutely. I have been talking to the Minister of Health about rural isolation and mental health issues. Sadly, many incidents happen in rural communities as a consequence of that isolation, when people do not have the opportunity to talk to others when they feel down and depressed. Those are all issues to which we need to find solutions. That is a collective task for all in the Assembly. We need to work together and in the best interests of all of our people, but, in this instance, for the rural community in particular.

Mr Speaker: I call Dolores Kelly, who has made it in the nick of time.

Mrs D Kelly: Just.

Lough Shore: Help for Local Fishermen

T6. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he can provide any help, including flood alleviation measures, for those local fishermen who have contacted her and who are very concerned about the impact of the recent floods at the lough shore, with many of them unable even to get across to their boats. (AQT 196/17-22)

Mr Poots: Maybe the Member needs to talk to the Minister for Infrastructure about flood alleviation and ensuring that our rivers maybe get a bit more dredging and can take more water away. If we look over at England and at many of the floods there, we see that it has been because of the lack of dredging that they have reached the point where many homes have flooded. Thankfully, in Northern Ireland, we did not get to that point this year, but we were not that far off it just a few days ago. We have had a bit of respite, but, were there to be further bad weather incidents, we could be at that point. We should not be at all complacent. I will visit the area to look at the conditions for myself.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Minister to have a look at that. Will there be collaboration across Departments, given the importance of the fishing industry to Lough Neagh?

Mr Poots: I know the importance of the eel industry. There used to be a Father —

Ms Ni Chuilín: Kennedy.

Mr Poots: Yes. When I was in DCAL, he reminded me about it often, so I know the importance of the eel fishing industry in that area. Many people want to acquire that premium product, so I understand that the fishermen need to have the opportunity to catch that very high value commodity.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. I ask Members to take their ease for a moment while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

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

Private Members' Business

Areas of Natural Constraint

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs decision to end areas of natural constraint support; notes that the decision has had a negative impact on farmers in severely disadvantaged areas; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to use the powers contained within schedule 6 to the Agriculture Bill (HC Bill 7) to bring forward a new areas of natural constraint scheme. — [Mr McAleer.]

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): The Assembly will be sick of looking at me. Nonetheless, since my appointment as Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister, I have had a number of calls to introduce the areas of natural constraint scheme and have listened to concerns that the closure of the ANC scheme had, in some way, brought disadvantage to farmers in severely disadvantaged areas (SDAs). I welcome the motion, as it affords me the opportunity to provide the facts around the closure of the scheme and the real impact that it had on farmers, and it allows me to again put on record that, going forward, I want to devise support schemes that are good for all our farmers, including those farming in the SDAs.

SDA farmers work on land that was classified as "severely disadvantaged" back in the 1970s, and around 485,000 hectares of agricultural land was classified as SDA. It makes up just under half of all agriculture in Northern Ireland and is farmed by just under 10,000 farmers, mostly beef and sheep farmers. The SDAs are concentrated mainly in the mountain areas of Mourne, the glens of Antrim, the Sperrins and most of Fermanagh. Those farms are so important to our ecosystem, to our environment and to the production of quality goods that are often finished elsewhere. The biophysical characteristics of the SDAs dictate that there are limited agriculture opportunities beyond cattle — that is, suckler cows — and sheep production. I am also aware that the economic viability of suckler cows and sheep production in the SDAs is vulnerable.

The ANC scheme formed part of the EU rural development programme 2014-2020 and was worth £20 million per annum in 2016-17. At that time, Minister O'Neill programmed the scheme to run for two years because she felt that that was all that was affordable, and a review of the ANC scheme was then to take place to determine the next steps. That was a review that Minister O'Neill asked for.

I should say that, when Minister O'Neill introduced the ANC scheme, the business case for it did not stack up. It was done by ministerial direction; it was not done on the basis of an identified need that was supported by a business plan.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr O'Dowd: The Minister has long experience of being a Minister in various Departments, and he always strikes me as a Minister who makes decisions rather than awaiting Civil Service advice or allowing civil servants to make the decisions. Will he not agree with me that, one, it is appropriate for a Minister to ask for a review — that does not mean that you will end the scheme — and, two, in some cases, a Minister stepping forward and making the decision, rather than simply following Civil Service advice, is often the best way forward?

Mr Poots: I was criticised by one of our local newspapers for taking a ministerial direction to give money to the Northern Ireland Hospice and Mencap some years ago, but I suggest that it was the best money that was ever spent by the Department of Health. Those are two wonderful facilities, and I recommend that Members go there to see the support and care that they provide to people in that arena. We have to take cognisance of the issues that are put before us, but civil servants give advice and Ministers make decisions. I am not afraid to do that.

It was recognised that the redistribution of the basic farm payment scheme pillar 1 fund since 2015 had given an uplift to the SDA farmers that equated to an additional £18 million. At the exchange rate that was used for direct payments by 2019, the uplift was at least comparable to previous ANC receipts in 2016 and 2017. For example, for ANC farmers in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the net uplift was £3.8 million. For those in West Tyrone, which covers the Sperrins, the net uplift was £4.3 million. For those in North Antrim, which covers the glens, the net uplift was £3.2 million. For those in Mid Ulster, which also covers the Sperrins, the net uplift was £2.6 million. All those areas have had an uplift as a result of convergence.

Mr McAleer: Will the Minister take an intervention?

Mr Poots: I will give way in one moment.

Some in the ANC scheme have lost out. The busiest livestock farmers lost out as a result of convergence. In general, however, ANC farmers have benefited from convergence. I will give way.

Mr McAleer: Does the Minister accept that the so-called uplift that he talks about happened only because farmers in the SDAs had been labouring well below the regional average for years and years?

Mr Poots: It is interesting that the Member raises that issue, because I know that one of his colleagues took the issue to the Equality Commission. The commission did not see any issue of equality in it, and it was thrown out. I have heard quite a number of Sinn Féin Members refer to equality in the debate, yet they did not refer to the fact that Sinn Féin had raised the matter with the Equality Commission and lost its case.

Given budgetary constraints at the time, it was not possible to source a new funding stream to continue operating the ANC scheme from Executive funds. The only alternative was to transfer money from pillar 1 — direct support payments — to create the necessary budget, and the clear message from the consultation that took place and the responses that came back was that that was not an acceptable option. I understand that Mr Catney wants to take money away from farmers in Lagan Valley and give it to farmers in the ANC area. Mr Blair wants to do that in South Antrim and give the money to farmers in

other constituencies. Mrs Barton wants to take money from Mr Nesbitt's constituency and give it to farmers in hers, and so it goes on. The truth is that farmers who had already benefited from convergence would then be dipping into the funds of other farmers who had already been disadvantaged as a result of convergence, and to do that would put those farmers into greater hardship.

The ROI has not moved as quickly as Northern Ireland towards convergence and a flat-rate pillar 1 payment per hectare, and payments are still more based on production. Those are key factors that everybody needs to take into account. Ms Dolan said that Sinn Féin does not agree. Not agreeing is one thing, but we have to look at the facts. Facts are stubborn things from which it is hard to get away. Scotland was mentioned in the debate: Scotland pays out £128 per hectare. Wales pays out £243 per hectare. England and the Republic of Ireland have managed to reach convergence, and they both pay £261 per hectare. Lo and behold, Northern Ireland pays £333 per hectare. Therefore, the farmers who own large swathes of land that is more in the hills than in the lowlands have benefited most and benefit more than any other farmer in these islands. Consequently, Minister McIlveen decided that the scheme would operate for just one additional transitional year on a budget of £8 million. Without that decision, the scheme would have ended in 2017.

Taking that on board, I can say that SDA farmers, as a whole, have increased the value of their total payments from the CAP, despite the ending of the ANC scheme. While there will always be winners and losers at an individual level, at a regional level there has been no negative impact on SDA farmers. I want to make it clear that I do not intend to introduce an ANC scheme this year: I cannot. It is simply not possible. It would be possible to introduce an ANC scheme under the new Agriculture Bill, but the Bill's provisions will be operational only from 2021 onwards.

These provisions have been designed so that the House and the Minister have flexibility to make such decisions, but I have to point out that, in order to introduce an ANC scheme, the funds would have to be provided by scaling back direct payments to all farmers, which would result in that transfer from farmers who have already yielded money towards the ANC areas having to yield further funds to some of the constituencies that I mentioned. That has to be seen in the context of the £18 million on an ongoing annual basis that has already moved into the SDA. Rather than reintroducing a second area-based payment, I will focus my time and effort on devising schemes and support measures that are good for all farmers, in particular younger people who want to come into farming, younger people who do not own large swathes of land, who have to rent land and who want to make a living off farming and make a go of it, as opposed to the people who already sit on amounts of land and are not properly utilising it.

The United Kingdom has left the European Union and the CAP, and the most significant policy change affecting the agri-food sector in over 40 years means that our policies do not have to be constrained by the existing CAP pillar 1 and pillar 2 construct. We need to move to something new that better addresses the needs of Northern Ireland agriculture. In 2018, my Department undertook an engagement exercise on a potential future agricultural policy framework for Northern Ireland, and, in that proposed framework, my officials, in conjunction with key

food, farming and environment stakeholders, identified four desired outcomes and a long-term vision for the Northern Ireland agri-food industry. The first of those is an industry that pursues increased productivity in international terms, closing the productivity gap that has been opening up with our major suppliers. An ANC scheme does not do that. The second is to have an industry that is environmentally sustainable in terms of its impact on and guardianship of air and water quality, soil health and carbon footprint and diversity. ANC does not do that. The third is to have an industry that displays improved resilience to external shocks such as market volatility and extreme weather events, which have never been more frequent and to which the industry has become very exposed. Again, ANC does not help with that. The fourth is to have an industry that operates with an integrated, efficient, sustainable, competitive and responsive supply chain with clear market signals and an overriding focus on high-quality food and the end consumer. ANC does not assist with that.

Those four outcomes complement each other and are broadly supported by the stakeholders. Our focus now needs to turn to how we can deliver those outcomes. I want, in particular, to mention the suggestion in the document around a basic farm resilience support as one possible option, moving forward, and the relevance to the debate today is that a basic farm resilience support payment could be designed to take into account issues such as natural disadvantage based on soil and climate factors, as well as targeting productive farmers. I have tasked officials to flesh out those ideas as quickly as possible.

That is only part of the solution. We need to help farmers, no matter where they are, to become more efficient and maximise sustainable returns so that they can achieve from the assets at their disposal. Those assets include the environmental assets on the farm, and SDA farms are well placed to play a major role in delivering more of the environmental outcomes that the citizens want and that we owe to future generations. Farmers should be properly rewarded for delivering those environmental outcomes, and it offers a way forward.

In summary, the role of SDA farmers, like all farmers, will evolve as we move forward. No industry can afford to stand still or, worse, go backwards. How we have done things in terms of convergence and all of that has not helped the industry to go forward and be more efficient and encourage young people into the industry. Most importantly, I want to devise the appropriate schemes and measures beyond 2020 that are good for all farmers and provide the basis of a sustainable and profitable future.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Philip McGuigan to wind up the debate. You will have 10 minutes.

Mr McGuigan: I thank my party colleague for bringing the debate before us. I thought that the discussion was very good and very useful. My party colleague Declan McAleer, who proposed the motion, talked about the North's reliance on agriculture.

He tabled the motion in the context of the Westminster Bill and stated that the ANC payment was at the discretion of the Minister and that we need to tailor our agriculture policy here to suit the North. He hoped that the Minister would use his discretion to reintroduce an ANC payment. He went on to talk about the farmers in those areas of need and that the payment created a leveller with other

farmers. He talked about the history of ANC support being enacted and subsequently withdrawn in 2016. In my biased opinion, I thought that he made a great case for its introduction.

3.45 pm

William Irwin acknowledged the difficulties of hill farmers, but he wanted that to be addressed as part of a UK solution. He said that support was needed, but he was not conclusive about what future support would look like. He went on to say that new arrangements should be based on production rather than area-based payments. He laboured that point. He felt that an ANC is not the best mechanism.

Pat Catney talked about the importance of agriculture and farming to our economy and landscape. It is a part of life here in the North. He told some very interesting stories about his childhood, particularly about gathering potatoes. It brought me back to my childhood. I miss gathering now that modern technology is used. Young people do not get the opportunity to gather spuds the way that we used to. He talked about 70% of the land in the North being in less-favoured areas. We need to encourage and promote environmental use of the land. He supported the motion.

Rosemary Barton talked about the quality of our produce and the environment here. She said that there had long been support through many years for hill farmers in various guises. She mentioned £100 per hectare and said that they were worse off than in lowland farms. She said that 10,000 farms were impacted as a result of no ANC payments. She detailed the impact that that has had in her constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

John Blair said that he supported the motion in principle. He said that small farmers are vital. Over and above the issue of farming, they are vital to the conservation of our landscape, tourism potential and protecting the coastline in some cases. He said that there was an opportunity for the Minister to introduce a new scheme of natural constraint.

Maurice Bradley talked about the uncertainty for farmers post Brexit. He welcomed the debate in the context of the Assembly getting to debate it from the North's point of view. He asked whether a land-based payment was good value for money and said that policy needs to be tailored to our market demands. Again — this theme flowed through all the DUP Members' contributions — production seemed to be the best way forward.

I congratulate Emma Sheerin on her maiden speech. I was born and raised in Swatragh, so I agree that Mid Ulster is a great place to live, particularly the Derry part of the constituency. She talked about the importance of agriculture to her constituents. She is the daughter of a sheep farmer in the Sperrins, so she understands the problems in working with the land in those particular circumstances. She said that an ANC payment was not a top-up that was spent on luxuries but was needed to pay bills or to invest in the local agriculture economy.

Jemma Dolan supported the motion. She said that 92.5% of her constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone is severely disadvantaged, and she compared it with the Minister's constituency, where 2% is the case. She talked about the ANC allowance helping many farmers who are struggling. She is a border constituency MLA, and she put it in the context that the lack of an ANC payment put farmers along the border at a disadvantage to their

neighbouring farms across the border. She talked about the importance of convergence through flat rate and expressed her disappointment that that convergence has been halted.

Daniel McCrossan —

Mr McAleer: I thank Philip for taking the intervention. I should have made a point of order earlier, but, in relation to the EQIA, that has not been tested by the Equality Commission because the date between the decision and the complaint being made to the Equality Commission exceeded 12 months. It did not pass that threshold. The decision was made, and it was only some time later, through the Department's own statistics, that it was realised that 67% of people in ANC areas were from the Catholic community. Religion is a protected category under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. That is the reason.

On the €333 per hectare, I can tell you that, up in the hills, people do not get near that. You are talking about entitlements of £100 or, maybe, £80 per hectare. That does not stack up across the North. I also think, and hopefully the Member will agree, that pitting areas against each other is very divisive and not a very helpful way to proceed.

Mr McGuigan: I completely agree with the sentiment. Yes.

Daniel McCrossan said that we need to send a clear message to all farmers that they will not be left behind because of Brexit. He also said that many farmers are struggling and need support and that he wanted to hear that support coming from the debate. He talked about the dedication and sacrifice of our farmers and their world-class produce. He went on to detail the flooding that had affected farmers in his constituency, and he said that they still have not been properly compensated for that. He also said that he has no faith in the British Government keeping the same level of funding offered by the EU after Brexit.

Clare Bailey gave her support to the motion. She put it into the context of the Agriculture Bill setting new policy for years to come and said that we need to get this right. She said that we need our own plan that meets our needs and that farmers in areas of natural constraint need to be given certainty. She also agreed that there should be specific and targeted economic interventions.

Jim Allister is always worth listening to. He agreed that hill farmers make an important contribution, but he went on to say that we need a policy that takes account of a limited pot of money. I hope that he will forgive me for paraphrasing him when I say that he was not a big fan of the flat-rate payment plus an ANC scheme. He seemed to be a lone figure in suggesting that Brexit will be good for hill farmers, as there will be fewer restrictions. He also pointed out that he had heard lots of whining. I repeat that: he heard lots of whining. My colleague intervened and gave him a promotion midway through the debate. According to him, the ANC hinders hill farmers.

Moving on, the Minister —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGuigan: Yes.

Mr Allister: I am sure that it was entirely unintentional that the Member would distort what I said [*Laughter*] but I point out that my criticisms were that the ANC was brought in, in part, because of EU regulations that restricted the farming

methods and choices of hill farmers and dictated how much stock they could have on the hills, what type of stock and the dates that they could have their stock on the hills and matters such as that. The ANC was supposed to be an antidote to EU smothering of the choice of local farmers. I said that we should get rid of the smothering and liberate the farmers and let them make their own decisions.

Mr McGuigan: I was not wanting to distort the Member's comments. A lot of hill farmers will be surprised to hear that they will now be better off because they have left the EU and have lost the ANC payment.

The Minister wanted to, in his words, introduce schemes "that are good for farmers", including those in SDAs. He said that the ANC scheme was worth £20 million. He said that it was implemented by Minister O'Neill. John O'Dowd corrected him when he talked about the scheme ending in two years and said that there would be a review after two years.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McGuigan: Sorry?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McGuigan: Sorry. I did not get to make my own remarks. *[Laughter.]* Everybody else spoke so well, and it was so interesting.

In conclusion, I support the motion. Our farmers need this payment.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 29.

AYES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Chambers, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Ms C Kelly, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin, Mr Stewart.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Dolan and Ms Sheerin.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr M Bradley and Mr Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs decision to end areas of natural constraint support; notes that the decision has had a negative impact on farmers in severely disadvantaged areas; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to use the powers contained within schedule 6 to the Agriculture Bill (HC Bill 7) to bring forward a new areas of natural constraint scheme.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs).]

Adjournment

Comber Greenway: Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Mr Robin Newton to raise the matter of investment in the Comber Greenway. The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for Infrastructure for taking time away from what I know are many very busy and competing priorities. At the start, I would like to pay tribute to two permanent secretaries who were in the Department prior to the restoration of the Assembly, namely Mr Peter May and Ms Katrina Godfrey, who made what contribution they could to the development of and investment in the Comber greenway. It is appropriate that we acknowledge the fact that they did that.

The Comber greenway is a seven-mile route that runs from east Belfast right through to Comber. It is recognised by a number of organisations that have an interest in cycling, well-being and health. Cycle NI said:

“From the Hollywood Arches to Dundonald the Greenway provides a tranquil green corridor through East Belfast”,

recognising it as a great asset. Walk NI said:

“This route provides a tranquil green corridor through East Belfast and ending passing through a rural landscape into Comber”.

Sustrans, which has had a major part to play in the development of the route, said that the Comber greenway:

“provides local people with a traffic-free route for walking or cycling”

from Comber through to east Belfast. Discover Northern Ireland said:

“The most remarkable feature of the Greenway is the feeling of rural escape from urban bustle.”

Each of those organisations recognises what an asset the Comber greenway is.

4.15 pm

I am pleased to say that Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council unanimously supported a motion calling for investment in the Comber greenway. Belfast City Council established a working group as a result of that motion. I look forward to Ards and North Down Borough Council giving consideration to a similar motion and working with the Department on the development of the greenway.

Belfast City Council, in its motion, noted:

“the benefits which the Comber Greenway facility has created in allowing Belfast’s citizens”

— Belfast’s citizens, not east Belfast citizens —

“and visitors to the City the opportunity to become increasingly active and to promote increased health benefits. The Council calls upon the Department for Infrastructure to develop, through a collective approach, a strategic, political and costed plan for the Comber Greenway, as part of the recently launched Strategic Plan for Greenways within Northern Ireland.”

We need to take notice of the benefits that greenways have, in general, brought to Northern Ireland. The best model of a greenway is the Connswater greenway. I have often referred to the Comber greenway as a sister project of the Connswater greenway. Both link at the junction of the Hollywood Arches, where there is a natural, continuous flow from one into the other.

The evaluation report of the Connswater greenway states:

“In many respects, CCG ... is a model and example of best practice for the development and delivery of large-scale, multi-partner, complex projects with multiple objectives. This is reflected in widespread national and international interest and through numerous awards and accolades, including recognition as one of the world’s 200 most influential projects by the Institution of Civil Engineers in 2018.”

There is no reason why the Comber greenway, with the right vision and support and with a holistic approach to its development, should not receive the same accolades. It has the potential to be a living landmark and a valuable, life-enhancing asset.

The Comber greenway has the potential to offer increased levels of walking, cycling and dog walking. I am pleased that the infrastructure is in to allow lighting to be applied from the Hollywood Arches to the Billy Neill playing fields. That is positive. We need to move to the next stage of lighting installation. I hope that the Minister will see that as a worthy investment.

The Comber greenway goes further than just a venue for walking, cycling and dog walking. Like its sister project, the Connswater greenway, it has the opportunity to apply to provide play facilities. It probably has a better opportunity than the Connswater greenway to encourage wildlife, to develop shrubbery and the bridges along its route, and to pay tribute to its long history as a railway track. A number of station platforms are still in situ, and there are groups interested in bringing them back into view. It has the potential to hold events and, indeed, to contribute overall to a much more holistic and healthy lifestyle for our communities.

Like greenways across the UK, the Comber greenway also has the opportunity to contribute to increased business and the creation of businesses, be that with the existing Hollywood Arches traders or new traders that could abut on to it. There is potential to develop the Hanwood Centre along the route, to increase the cycle facilities that have been provided by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and to have guest houses abut on to it.

There is a major opportunity where the Comber greenway reaches Dundonald village. I accept that Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council is working on another plan, but Dundonald village is described in the current plan, in about six lines, as a village with a high level of vehicular traffic going through it and a number of boarded-up properties. It is a shame that you can rent a property in Dundonald

village if you pay the rates. You do not need to pay rent; you can pay the rates, and you will get a property in Dundonald village. Travel a mile down the road to Ballyhackamore and you will pay top dollar for a property renting — a mile down the road. There is potential for the Comber greenway to link with the Comber Road shops and with Dundonald village, providing increased business opportunities and the opportunity to enhance Dundonald village. That would be a significant feature if we were to invest in the Comber greenway, and it could enhance life in and around Dundonald village.

It is not possible to think of it just as somewhere to walk or cycle. We need to think of it in a holistic manner. We need to think about what abuts on to the Comber greenway on either side and about its potential as a whole. I am pleased that the Minister, in her former life and in her current role, has been a supporter of the greenway movement and the cycling movement and so on. I am not quite sure what her role was here, but I am pleased that, Nichola Mallon, as an elected representative, paid tribute and said:

“I personally have enjoyed the cycle along the Comber Greenway”.

Indeed, she went on to say that:

“and as a party, we are keen to explore further development of Greenways”.

She added:

“The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland needs a long-term and dedicated strategy to improve cycling provision.”

We have an opportunity to do that here. Indeed, we have an opportunity to do much more than just develop the cycling strategy.

I will finish by saying that, in its document ‘Exercise, Explore, Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways’, the Department outlines its vision, aims and objectives. It states:

“The Minister for Infrastructure is committed to active travel and strongly supports improving health and wellbeing for everyone across the region. In setting out this Strategic Plan for Greenways, the Minister’s vision is a region where people have ready access to a safe traffic-free environment for health, active travel and leisure.”

The case for investment in the Comber greenway is indisputable. It brings so much to that corridor from east Belfast to Comber, and not just for those who live in areas abutting on to it. There is the additional potential for business activity and education opportunities for our children, who can use it as a play area. It brings a holistic approach to improving our overall health and well-being.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Other Members will have five minutes in which to contribute to the Adjournment debate.

Mr Allen: I follow the esteemed Member and colleague from East Belfast whom I have had the opportunity, from my time in the House, to work with on a number of occasions. We have worked quite well together. I recall him securing previous Adjournment debates. I am sure that he is glad to be back down to the area of the House from where he can again contribute as a Member working for

the community on the ground. I am sure that he continued to do that in his role as Speaker.

As the Member, quite rightly, pointed out, the Comber greenway is a wonderfully tranquil green corridor that runs all the way from Comber to the heart of east Belfast. As he highlighted, the greenway is about much more than just east Belfast. It is about looking at the wider context of the greenway and all the positive benefits that flow from it. It would be remiss of us to zone in on the cycling and walking benefits. There is so much more to greenways. They bring potential footfall to businesses along their route. When doing a bit of research prior to this Adjournment debate, I came across some statistics. It is estimated that, for every £1 invested in greenways, the return is up to £4. It is about looking at greenways in that wider context and the positive benefit that they deliver for our wider communities.

Recently, people from the wider community made representations to me. They want further investment in the Comber greenway and, indeed, the enhancement of greenways right across Belfast and Northern Ireland. I welcome the fact that the Minister is here. I welcome her positive attitude towards greenways and the commitment that she has given to them. I have worked very well with the Minister in the past, and I have no doubt that she will do everything that she can to invest.

I note that there are plans to enhance greenways. The current greenway stretches for seven miles. My young children — aged 11, seven and 15 months — very much enjoy going out at the weekend with their nanny Linda and walking along a stretch of the greenway. I am very happy that the Member brought the matter to the House. I am very happy to support it and to work with him, other colleagues across east Belfast and colleagues across Northern Ireland to work towards the realisation of that commitment to invest in our greenways.

Mr Lyttle: As MLA for East Belfast and chairperson of the Assembly all-party group on cycling, I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the outstanding community facility running through my constituency that is the Comber greenway. I thank my colleague Robin Newton MLA for availing himself of the Adjournment debate opportunity so that we could do so collectively.

On the wall of the constituency office that I share with Naomi Long MLA hangs a letter that we received at a time when a former Regional Development Minister was considering replacing the greenway with light rail. It reads:

“Please keep our greenway. We always cycle on it. The trees give us oxygen and blackberries. Thank you. Oisín Doran, 7 years on this planet.”

I am glad for Oisín and the many people who use, enjoy and rely on that clean, green traffic-free cycle route and walkway daily that the campaign to save and maintain the Comber greenway was a success. That seven-mile section of the national cycle network is one of the few traffic-free walk and cycle greenways available in Belfast and, indeed, Northern Ireland, the like of which is vital to advancing the sustainable and active travel provision that we need to address the climate change, health and pollution challenges that face our population and planet.

4.30 pm

There are many positive benefits of the Comber greenway: transport; physical and mental health; community and business connectivity; and, of course, environmental. It is vital, therefore, that we work together to protect and enhance the greenway. My Alliance Party colleagues and I have consistently worked to protect and develop the Comber greenway. That has included working with the Department for Infrastructure, local councils, Sustrans and the Eastside Partnership to secure the installation of toucan crossings at key road crossings, such as at Beersbridge Road and Kings Road; path-widening schemes; public realm improvements at the Bloomfield walkway section of the Comber greenway; and the installation of one of the first if not the first bike stations in Northern Ireland at the Billy Neill soccer centre.

Further improvements are needed, including works at Island Street to extend and link the greenway to Titanic Quarter, ramps at North Road bridge, bins, seating, improved signage, better management of green space and enhanced linkage of the Comber greenway and Connswater Community Greenway, as part of the EastSide Greenways and the Northern Ireland Greenways strategies.

I have recently corresponded with the Department for Infrastructure to press for the introduction of lighting, as has been mentioned by other Members, at key sections of the Comber greenway, the like of which has been key to the success of the world-class, award-winning Connswater Community Greenway; indeed, the vision and the future development of the Comber greenway should be based on the Connswater Community Greenway model of a multi-use, linear park and walk-and-cycle way, adopted and maintained to the highest standards possible with the support of the councils in which it is located. I welcome the leadership shown by the former Alliance Lord Mayors of Belfast and Lisburn and Castlereagh — Nuala McAllister and Tim Morrow — to work in partnership with Sustrans and the Department for Infrastructure to explore and advance that model. I understand that work has been ongoing between the Department for Infrastructure and councils to progress that approach, and I welcome the attendance of the Minister for Infrastructure today to update the Assembly on the matter.

The sustainable and active travel, social, health and economic potential of the Comber greenway is vast, and Alliance Party representatives will give our full support to the Minister for Infrastructure and our elected colleagues to work together to do all we can to realise that potential.

Miss McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Infrastructure): First, I thank the proposer for tabling the Adjournment debate. Robin has been a great advocate of the Comber and the Connswater greenways. We can all agree that greenways such as the Comber greenway are an investment in the health and well-being of all our communities. I have used the Comber greenway on numerous occasions as a pedestrian and a cyclist, along with my colleague Joanne Bunting. As you travel along the greenway, it is evident that it attracts users of all ages and abilities. There are those on their own, those with families — both young and older families — and those with friends. It presents an opportunity to re-engage with nature and to exercise in a traffic-free environment. Certainly, the expansion of greenways in the UK and Europe has proven to be extraordinarily popular and a huge draw for tourists.

Having my constituency office in Comber, I see at first hand the benefit of the greenway to the town and, in particular, to the local coffee shops. There are, therefore, numerous benefits to investments in our greenway network.

The development of the Connswater greenway has been a great addition to east Belfast, with its link to the Comber greenway. However, the contrast between the two is stark. The lack of lighting along the Comber greenway makes it unsafe and practically unusable once the evening starts to draw in. The fact that the greenway was constructed without some lighting provision is difficult to fathom. While I appreciate that work has commenced in East Belfast at that end of the greenway, if we are to encourage commuters from my constituency to use it as an alternative to the car, it is imperative that lighting be installed along the full route.

While the proposer has talked about the enhancement of the Comber greenway as it currently exists, as well as its future management, I am keen to see further expansion of the network. As part of a fact-finding visit, I went to the Netherlands to look at the fast-cycle route between Arnhem and Nijmegen and at how high-quality, dense cycling infrastructure networks enable local children to cycle to school and to assess the urban cycling infrastructure in Amsterdam. I also took the opportunity to go to Edinburgh to learn the lessons from their greenway expansions.

I have been a consistent advocate of our greenways, which is why, when I held the post of Regional Development Minister, I launched a fund to enable councils to undertake feasibility studies of expanding the greenway network in their area. As a Strangford MLA, I was delighted that Ards and North Down Borough Council availed itself of the opportunity to look at an ambitious expansion that sought to extend the Comber greenway through Comber itself to Newtownards and on to Bangor, connecting with the north Down coastal path. In principle, that is a fantastic concept that provides a large, circuitous and traffic-free route. However, problems have arisen in the conduct of consultations and how information has been presented to local landowners. It is natural that landowners and residents will have certain reservations, and those concerns need to be managed sensitively. There is a wealth of evidence now available to show how concerns about problems such as antisocial behaviour are largely unfounded and how, for example, those living along the Connswater greenway have embraced it. It is little wonder, though, that locals have objected when the “vesting” word has been used.

As we focus on an outcomes-based approach, investment in greenways can meet many of the outcomes, including connecting people; helping people to enjoy a long, healthy and active life; helping people to live and work sustainably; and creating places where people want to live and work, visit and invest. We should improve and expand such fantastic assets, but those charged with carrying out that function need to apply the lessons learned from other schemes in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. We need to ensure that there is consensus and acceptance not only from those who use greenways but from those who accommodate them when they go through or run adjacent to their property. Consensus and accommodation are obtained not through confrontation but through consultation and engagement.

In conclusion, I welcome the opportunity to have contributed to today's debate, and I look forward to seeing improvements being made to my local greenway.

Ms Bunting: At this point, I feel as though I should declare my interest as a member of the Policing Board. That seems to be what I do this weather [*Laughter.*] I am only joking. It has been quite the justice week.

I am grateful to my colleague Robin for securing the Adjournment debate. There can be no question about the benefits of greenways for physical health and undoubtedly for mental health. The value of time spent with friends or family, relaxing, winding down, seeing some animals, having a good laugh and getting some exercise while we are at it cannot be overstated.

Without reliving all our yesterdays, as my colleague Michelle McIlveen said, many a time, on one of our various health kicks, we cycled from Comber, right down the Comber greenway, right down the Connswater greenway and over to Carrick. Obviously, the benefits of that are cake and ice cream, and neither of us will deny that. Sometimes, you need a bit of an incentive, and that certainly worked for us.

The truth about the Comber greenway, as it currently stands, is that, if you mistime your cycle, you are in pitch black, you are potentially riding through dog mess, you are scared of running over animals rather than seeing them and you have no idea about who else is around. Therefore, there are safety issues and health concerns. Perhaps the Comber greenway is not being used to its maximum potential on the basis of some of those issues, which could be resolved to make the greenway a bit more like the Connswater greenway.

As my colleagues have mentioned, the Connswater greenway has become an international model of best practice. The folks from Connswater have travelled around the world, extolling the benefits of their greenway, and they have received numerous awards for the successes that they have achieved, not the least of which is flood alleviation. The Connswater greenway has enormous use and is of spectacular value to East Belfast and beyond. The thing with the Comber greenway is that it always feels as though it is the bridesmaid to the Connswater bride.

That is not to say that there has not been investment: there has. There has been significant improvement in the past number of years. I remember a couple of years ago — on my birthday, actually — going down because a number of organisations such as Sustrans, the Department, Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council had made significant investment, as Robin mentioned, installing the connectivity for lights — albeit that there are no lights there — widening the path and resurfacing. Then we have Lisburn's investment at the Billy Neill centre, which Chris Lyttle referred to. There has been ongoing work, and there is no question about the potential. There is so much potential for connectivity at the Comber greenway, and the difference that lights would make to use and safety would be immense.

Other colleagues have referred — there is no point in repeating it — to the benefits to the economy, local businesses, housing and safety, especially with regard to health and getting children to set down their gadgets and be outside in the fresh air with their parents, enjoying their young lives and their energy while they still have it. A lot

of us wish we still did. The only thing I would say to the Minister is this: perhaps, it is time for Cinderella to become a princess.

Mr Harvey: Why would we want to invest in the Comber greenway? Is it because it is seven miles of the most wonderful, tranquil green corridor in the UK? It is classified as being easy, making it ideal for most, whether leisure walking or cycling. It takes in views of Stormont, Scrabo Tower, the two Harland and Wolff cranes, the CS Lewis statue and the Titanic centre. It is an ideal length of seven miles and takes approximately one hour to complete, and the bonus is that it is traffic-free. It is one of the most popular greenways in the UK, and I would welcome any future improvements or upgrades to this popular and well-used walkway that promotes health and well-being among all its users.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Some interest has been expressed beyond the immediate area, and I now invite Philip McGuigan to comment on investment in the Comber greenway.

Mr McGuigan: I accept that I am not from the constituency, but, as everybody should know, I have an interest in cycling, so I will never pass up an opportunity to promote cycling and investment in cycling. I have cycled on the Comber greenway on a couple of occasions, and I concur that it is a great asset. I would support further investment in the Comber greenway and further investment in other greenways. I want the ambitious target of 1,000 kilometres, as detailed in the North's greenway strategy, to become a reality.

I take the opportunity to commend Jonathan Hobbs for the work that he has done in this field in promoting, pushing and cajoling the greenways strategy and cycling in general. I also want to mention the contact that I have had over the years with Andrew Grieve in the cycling department and thank him for his help to me in promoting cycling. I thank my party colleague Chris Hazzard, who introduced the greenways strategy in 2016.

What are greenways? Greenways create economic activity, improve cycling and walking opportunities, improve health through active living, enhance community identity and improve tourism opportunities. In my view, cycling and walking are vital to all the above. You can then throw in climate change. The more people we can get cycling and walking and being involved in active transport, the greater the saving it will produce for our health service. We can see the importance of all of this.

I hope that the Minister is able to invest in greenways to ensure that momentum is not lost. As I said, I want to see the 1,000 kilometres and much more come to fruition, particularly the two greenways in my constituency. The glens of Antrim greenway is proposed to run from Ballymena to Cushendall. I know that there is good work going on, particularly out round Glenravel, but I want to see that become a proper greenway in totality. I also want to see the Ballycastle to Ballymoney greenway opening up opportunities beyond the city.

I understand that the argument for moving people in cities is greater than, perhaps, it is in rural constituencies, but rural communities need to be able to obtain the same benefits from greenways as urban dwellers.

4.45 pm

I will wholeheartedly support any investment that the Minister can provide. In June 2019, in the South, €40 million was announced for 10 new greenways. The advanced state of the greenway infrastructure there is already over and above what it is in the North. I understand that, in 2019, we did not have a Minister, but only £3 million was allocated to all cycling and walking infrastructure, not even mentioning greenways. The 2015 bicycle strategy suggested an investment of £12.5 million per annum over five years, and £18 million per annum within 10 years to build a comprehensive cycling network across the North.

I am enthusiastic about cycling. I am delighted that I am able to cycle. In my view, cycling is a wonder drug that can cure many of the ills of society, climate change, and the individual. My physical and mental health has certainly improved since I took up cycling. Not everyone accepts that: not everyone is open yet to the wonder drug that is cycling. I am a great fan of the film 'Field of Dreams'. I often use the phrase:

"If you build it, they will come."

If you can build the infrastructure, people will come. The North, as a society, and all its citizens will benefit.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind Members not to walk in front of another Member when he is speaking.

Mr Durkan: Like the previous contributor, I might be a bit more geographically removed from the Comber greenway. I was certainly impressed by the very intricate knowledge of it that has been demonstrated by some of the East Belfast Members. Chris Lyttle knows every square inch of that greenway. I think of him now as Crocodile Dundonald. *[Laughter.]* I am not a complete stranger to the greenway, however. I recall, on occasions during my time as a Minister, I had my driver leave me six or seven miles out the road or along the greenway in the mornings, and I ran here. I experienced many of the benefits that Members mentioned. It was a great way to clear the head and prepare for the day ahead, and I probably got here more quickly, although that is more a reflection on Billy's driving than on my running, to be honest. The virtues of the greenway, and greenways in general, have been stated. The Comber greenway is clearly held very dear by the people of East Belfast, and true affinity with and affection for the greenway can be heard in the comments of the elected Members.

It is vital that we do what we can to expand the greenway network. I am heartened by statements from the Minister so far. Her presence in the Chamber demonstrates her commitment to improve the greenway infrastructure. The benefits are manifold. The environmental ones are clear and obvious: they are there in the name "greenway". Then there are the economic benefits, which are not always as immediately obvious, although some Members on the opposite Benches have mentioned them. I have certainly seen them in other areas. I was fortunate enough to spend a couple of holidays in France, just outside Bordeaux, where there is over 100 kilometres of —

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

Mr Newton: I am struck by the fact that the Member was prepared to run five or six miles to get to the Building.

Perhaps I should have mentioned some of the statistics, which match the Member's approach. Sixty per cent of people who could have used a car to get to work instead chose to make their journeys on foot or by bicycle. A total of 245,422 people made trips on the route in 2012. There has been a significant increase since then, with 86% of people who have used the route saying that it helped them, just as you said, to increase their level of activity.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the intervention and for demonstrating just how well-used the Comber greenway is. I think that it is fair to assume that use increases on all our greenways year-on-year.

I was touching on the economic benefits and on what I had seen in France, but you do not have to go that far afield to see it. You had cafes and coffee shops and so forth sprouting up along the route of the greenway. I was there for a couple of weeks, and I used the greenway daily to go and do shopping. It was a lot safer than trying to get used to driving on the right-hand side of the road. In County Mayo too, we have a great greenway network that has delivered a real economic dividend for that area. Many tourists come from far and wide to visit it. I believe that investing more in our greenways and marketing them better is why more people are using them, including our local people. Often these greenways are among our best-kept secrets, and I think that we have to market them better. Whenever we are marketing individual constituencies or the North in general as a tourist destination, we should be putting them in the foreground. There is a big market for it, and I think that we should become known more for our cycle paths than our psychopaths.

I will now get onto my own constituency, where we are blessed with a good greenway infrastructure, despite our many hills that make cycling not that easy. The Minister has pledged to deliver on EAPCs, which might make it a bit easier for some. We hope to expand that greenway infrastructure that we are blessed with in the near future. There are a couple of cross-border projects funded through Europe, with greenways running into Buncrana and Muff in Donegal. The Minister would be extremely disappointed, I am sure, if I were not to mention the Strathfoyle greenway —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): We are straying a long way from the Comber greenway.

Mr Durkan: — on which her officials have been working hard in the absence of Ministers, I have to say. It would be remiss of us not to mention that the absence of an Assembly for three years has cost us a lot of opportunities with our greenway infrastructure.

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): I thank Mr Newton for instigating this debate on investment in the Comber greenway and for his acknowledgement of the commitment and the work that has gone into trying to progress the Comber greenway from the previous and the current permanent secretary. It is appreciated.

This is not the first time that Mr Newton has brought a debate to the Assembly on the Comber greenway, and I think it is testimony to his commitment that he has again brought an Adjournment debate so early on in our

re-establishment. I thank him for his comments and for all Members' comments. It is very clear that all share a passion for active travel, for better-connected communities and for creating green safe space where we can enhance our physical and mental health.

On a general note, since I have been appointed Minister, I have made it clear that my focus is on doing what I can to improve the life of everyone living right across Northern Ireland. As an important part of that focus, I want to increase the proportion of everyday journeys made by walking and cycling across the North. As Mr Newton so elegantly quoted, greenways provide a "rural escape from urban bustle".

The benefits of developing greenways are many, and the health and lifestyle benefits are well-understood and have been articulated by everyone in the Chamber this evening. In addition, there are social and economic benefits for communities, in particular in building dynamic local communities and vibrant economies. Walking and cycling are key elements of thriving towns and cities. In addition, more walking and cycling, especially for the shorter journeys that make up one third of all journeys that we make every day, will help to create a cleaner environment and ensure that all of us play our part in tackling the climate crisis.

I recognise that greenways can help to give people the freedom and confidence to walk, to start to cycle or to cycle more, all in a safe, traffic-free and pleasant environment, whether for commuting, travelling to and from school or going about their everyday business. Greenways provide opportunities for walking groups, for older people and, as Ms Bunting articulated, for people of all ages to get active and have fun moments of friendship.

It is clear from experience with the Comber greenway that, in the urban environment, greenways have the significant benefit of improving off-road routes for commuting to and from work and places of education.

Data from counters on the Comber greenway indicates that in the order of 300,000 journeys are made on the greenway each year. In recent years, a total of £1.5 million has been invested in the Comber greenway route by my Department and other stakeholders. As Ms Bunting referenced, the investment included around £500,000 on widening the greenway from 3 metres to 4 metres — that was done in association with the Department for Communities — and around £500,000 on improving access points at the Grahamsbridge Road junction and a new walking and cycling bridge at the Dundonald International Ice Bowl, which was a Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council project supported by my Department.

I assure Members that I share their passion, and I am keen to consider carefully how the development of greenways generally can deliver projects that have the potential to improve people's lives and connect communities. I want to work collaboratively with Ministers, councils and other stakeholders to develop the Comber greenway and our other assets to make a real difference for our communities and to people's lives.

Once the Budget process provides clarity on the resources available to me, I will be able to firm up my objectives for cycling and active travel. I can, however, give Members my firm commitment that delivering more ways for the public to

access active travel will be part of my focus over the next two years.

With budget pressures and environmental challenges, we need to think big and think boldly about how we can deliver radical change. Enhancing health and improving well-being are key to connecting communities and tackling the climate crisis. With improving lives as our focus, we can and will deliver more. Creative use of our spaces, such as the development of greenways, will help us to achieve that vision, and I look forward to working in partnership to build on the successes already realised and deliver action on active travel.

Members raised specific points during the debate. Mr Newton pointed out that some lighting infrastructure has been put in place and ducting installed. I recognise the importance of lighting. As other Members said, lighting is key to enhancing greenways and to making people feel safe.

I assure Members that I want to see what more I can do to remove the barriers for people who want to walk and cycle more. When the budget settlement becomes clear, it is an area that I want to focus on, but it is important to say that I want to work in partnership with councils on delivery.

Mr Newton, Mr Lyttle and others mentioned trying to improve the attractiveness of our greenway as a community facility. Yes, that includes lighting, but it also includes the provision of other facilities such as seating. I am keen to investigate the possibilities through working with the councils. As Members will know, councils have wider powers for community facilities — powers that my Department does not have — and it appears that they have scope to develop the greenway as the linear park that Members expressed support for. I agree with Members that this is important for delivering on the physical and mental health and well-being outcomes in our Programme for Government, so I am keen to work with Members and the three named councils as we try to move this forward.

There is also a need, as Members said, to better connect our greenways, and I need to back that commitment with money.

I understand that, and I agree with the vision and approach that was articulated by Mr McGuigan:

"If you build it, they will come".

Once the budget has been set, I want to see what I can do to deliver on my vision for the greenways.

5.00 pm

I take on board the points that were raised by Miss McIlveen, the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee. She has been on fact-finding missions, she has been a Minister and she understands. I am aware of the grant support programme that she had, and I am positively looking at that. I am also mindful that we need to learn the lessons about consultation and communication that she referred to. She is right: we need to build consensus and accommodation among those who use our greenways and those who neighbour them. I want to ensure that that lesson is learned going forward.

I also want to thank other Members who spoke. Mr McGuigan and Mr Durkan spoke about the importance of greenways and referred, with your indulgence, to issues in their constituencies. I am happy to try to pick

those up, because I want to have a proactive and positive overarching approach to our greenways.

To sum up, Members are right: the evidence is there — we know that it is there — that greenways increase levels of walking and cycling, address flood alleviation, enhance biodiversity and grow local businesses. They also bring joy to children, be they Mr Allen's three children or Oisín, who Mr Lyttle referred to. As Miss McIlveen and Ms Bunting said, they are places where you can go to begin or to continue a health kick or where you can go with your friends to spend time and relax and enjoy each other's company.

I want to do what I can. I believe that the best way to do it is in partnership with others. Key to that will be a proactive partnership between my Department and the Department for Communities, but councils and communities also have a key role to play. Great progress could be made in the further development of the Comber greenway through better partnership working between my Department — I am willing to play my part in that — and the three councils that are particularly relevant to this case. As Mr Lyttle said, a steering group has been set up by my Department, and I have asked officials to re-engage in that and step that process up a gear.

I recognise the importance of the Comber greenway. I again want to thank Mr Newton for bringing the issue to the Floor. I also want to thank all Members who spoke so passionately about the Comber greenway and the need for more greenways across the North. I want to work with you and in partnership with others so that we can see that ambition for a greener, more sustainable, more environmentally friendly and connected society delivered on the ground. Thank you, Members.

Adjourned at 5.02 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

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

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Department of Finance

2019-2020 Public Expenditure Further Allocations

Published on Monday 17 February 2020.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): The purpose of this Statement is to inform the Assembly of late changes made to the 2019-20 Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) budget by the Treasury and the actions taken by the Executive as a result.

Changes to budgets by Treasury would normally be known well in advance of this stage of the year and factored into the appropriate Monitoring round. While numbers would be confirmed during the Supplementary Estimate process it is unusual for significant changes to be notified at this late stage.

The late changes notified by the Treasury are a net increase of £18 million Resource DEL, a net decrease of £52 million in Capital DEL and a decrease of £59 million in Financial Transaction Capital (FTC) when compared with the changes to budgets anticipated in January.

The changes arise as a result of some unexpected Barnett consequential additions offset by Barnett reductions that have been applied as a result of the decisions taken by Whitehall Ministers to fund some large reserve claims with reductions in other areas.

In view of the late stage in this financial year the Executive has moved quickly to agree the following:

Resource DEL Budget

Whilst the option existed to carry the additional Resource DEL allocation forward to 2020-21, in view of the unfunded pressures in departments following the conclusion of the January Monitoring round, and the commitment given to review additional allocations should further funding become available, the Executive has decided to access that funding in this year.

Of the additional £18 million Resource DEL available, £1.3 million is in relation to the Immigration Health Surcharge and must be passed on to the Department of Health.

The remaining £16.7 million available will be allocated as follows.

Department of Education

£10.0 million to the Department of Education to aid in addressing pressures within the education sector.

Department for Infrastructure

£3.0 million to the Department for Infrastructure to provide services to deal with winter conditions.

Department of Health

£3.7 million to the Department of Health for doctors and dentist pay pressures.

Capital DEL Budget

Treasury has provided details of a net decrease of £52 million in our Capital DEL, at this stage of a financial year a reduction of that magnitude poses significant challenges.

The Capital DEL budget was fully allocated as a result of my statement on the January Monitoring outcome, so this reduction could only be managed in-year if significant underspends were anticipated or if departments were able to take action to stop planned expenditure.

The decision has therefore been made to defer the Capital reduction until 2020-21, where it can be managed as part of the wider Budget process.

Financial Transactions Capital

Treasury has provided details of a net decrease of £59 million in Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) DEL which we are accepting in this financial year, on the basis and, as previously indicated to the Assembly, £150.8 million FTC remained unallocated after January Monitoring round.

Department of Health

RQIA Review of the Governance of Outpatient Services

Published at 11.00 am on Friday 21 February 2020.

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health):

Introduction

The clinicians and staff working in the health and social care sector have a critical role to play in improving and safeguarding the health and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. We rely and trust that the care provided is of the highest possible standard and that diagnosis and treatment are made in the best interests of the patient.

In the vast majority of cases, the care provided in the Northern Ireland Health & Social Care sector is compassionate and caring as well as being in line with professional standards and guidelines.

However, in the rare situations when the standard of care falls short it is critical that action is taken to correct the situation as quickly as possible. In addition, it is also important to understand why the situation occurred to reduce the risk of it happening again in the future.

When the Department of Health was made aware by the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BHSC) of the concerns over the standard of care provided by a consultant neurologist, the immediate need was to review the treatment of the patients who were under that consultant's care.

In response, a recall of the consultant's current patients was initiated in May 2018 followed by a further recall of his previous patients in high risk groups. Over 4,100 patients have had their treatment reviewed to date.

RQIA Review of Outpatient Services

Whilst the primary focus has been to ensure that patients are now receiving the right care it is important that there is a good understanding of what went wrong; to determine if it is currently going wrong elsewhere; and to ensure that the chances of it happening again can be reduced.

To this end, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) was commissioned in May 2018 to undertake a review into the governance arrangements for outpatient services in the BHSC.

The review was taken forward by an Expert Review Team which met with staff from the BHSC, the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA). The review team also conducted unannounced multidisciplinary inspections, held focus group discussions and undertook a survey of General Practitioners (GPs).

The RQIA has now published the final report from the review which is available on the organisations website: <https://www.rqia.org.uk/reviews/rqia-s-neurology-work-programme/>

The key findings from the review are as follows:

Clinical Peer Review- the potential for isolation of medical and/or specialist nursing staff was identified as a particular risk. The risk was greatest where there is lone working

outside a multidisciplinary team context, perhaps due to the nature of the specialty, by the choice of the health professional or because of a lack of governing systems across the service in question;

Access and Organisation- there is a need for streamlining the mechanisms for referring patients to Belfast Trust with more robust validation of waiting lists and triaging of patient referrals also required. There is also an opportunity to improve the written communication with patients following their visit;

Safeguarding- the levels of training, knowledge and awareness of staff across outpatient services in relation to safeguarding were a significant issue of concern. In response the matter was escalated to senior management in BHSC. The RQIA continues to monitor the Trust's delivery of improvements in this area in line with its escalation policy;

Medicines Management- while there is robust oversight of prescribing of specialist medicines there is only limited oversight of all other prescribing in outpatient services. Significant weaknesses were identified in the monitoring and oversight of medicines prescribed or recommended to be prescribed as the current system is based on hard copy advice to GPs which limits the ability of the Trust to identify unusual prescribing practices;

Governance Arrangements- while arrangements were clear, or in the process of being clarified through Directorate and Divisional structures, arrangements were not necessarily as clear for staff providing care and/or treatment in outpatient services. The importance of Charge Nurses/Ward managers in providing stable effective leadership was highlighted although the review did not find evidence that they were sufficiently connected to the collective leadership structures or could affect improvements at a system level;

Patient engagement- although the opportunities in some services/locations for patients to provide real time feedback were encouraging, there is a need to have consistent mechanisms to ensure that patient views are harnessed across all outpatients services; and

Information and Intelligence- use of data, information and intelligence could improve oversight of the activity and outcomes of consultants and specialist nurses in outpatient services.

The report concludes that the review team had observed many good examples of compassionate and patient centred care, and recognised the work undertaken by the Trust to implement a comprehensive governance structure and quality assurance framework. However, the report also found that outpatient services span a range of Directorates and specialties which means that oversight arrangements can be complex, with the risk of poor cohesion.

There are 26 recommendations for BHSC within the report including that the Trust should develop, implement and assure a systematic approach to clinical peer review across its outpatient services as well as that data on clinical activity and patient outcomes should be routinely collected, reported and shared.

Next Steps

Although the focus of the review was on BHSC, the RQIA have identified that many of the findings are also

potentially applicable to other Trusts. In response, the HSCB and PHA have been commissioned to work with all the Health & Social Care Trusts to identify the findings and recommendations from the RQIA review that are expected to apply to all NI Health & Social Care (HSC) Trusts rather than BHSCT alone. The HSCB and PHA will then work with the Trusts to develop an Action Plan by September 2020 to address the recommendations from the RQIA review.

During 2020 the RQIA will now evaluate the governance of outpatient services in the other Trusts. The additional findings from the evaluation of the other individual Trusts that have regional implications will also be considered as part of the work being taken forward by the HSCB and PHA.

This is the first of the three reviews that the RQIA is undertaking as part of the response to the Neurology Recall. In particular, the RQIA is also conducting an expert review of the clinical records of all patients or former patients of the consultant neurologist who have died over the past 10 years as well as a review of governance arrangements in independent hospitals and hospices.

The independent sector review is nearing completion whilst the review of deceased patients has been delayed due to the need to put the necessary legal arrangements in place to allow for the medical records to be examined.

In respect of the wider recall, the Outcomes Report from the first phase has shown that approximately one fifth of the active caseload had a not secure diagnosis. The findings from the second phase of the recall are being analysed with a report expected to be published in the spring, at which time an announcement will be made in respect of the need for a further recall.

Department of Health

Response to the Emergence of Coronavirus (2019 NCov) — Update

Published at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 26 February 2020.

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): Further to my written statements on novel Coronavirus COVID-19 to the Assembly in recent weeks I wish to give Members a further update on developments.

While the number of cases of COVID-19 has continued to rise the risk to the UK remains moderate on the advice of the UK Chief Medical Officers. There have been 13 confirmed cases in the UK to date. None of these has been in Northern Ireland. Tried and tested infection control procedures are being used to prevent further spread of the virus.

Any confirmed cases in Northern Ireland will be admitted to the Regional Infectious Disease Unit (RIDU) in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, if the patient is aged 16 years or over. If the patient is under 16 they will be admitted to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. I personally assessed our resilience last week and visited the RIDU. I was extremely impressed by the facilities and the highly trained staff.

As Members will appreciate, this is a rapidly changing situation. In light of developments internationally the case definition was changed on 25th February with travel advice issued for people returning from countries and regions including Iran, South Korea and northern Italy.

Updated guidance was issued to health care professionals on the 25th February. Guidance for other Departments and their authorities, including schools, is being updated and will issue shortly. In the meantime my Department is emphasising that if anyone has any concerns they should check the Public Health Agency's website which will direct them to the most up-to-date information. The PHA is content to provide advice directly to any concerned head teachers who have school trips returning from affected areas, and will be working proactively on this issue.

It is important that we remain calm and focused on containment at this point. The risk to individuals in the UK has not changed at this stage but we should continue to plan and be ready for all eventualities.

I am continuing to work with other UK Ministers to ensure that we coordinate our planning. My Department is also working closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland as the outbreak develops to ensure that we are ready to deal with the situation. My Chief Medical Officer remains in regular contact with his counterparts in the rest of the UK and in the Republic of Ireland.

My priority as Minister is to ensure that all effective measures are in place in Northern Ireland.

I will provide further statements to the Assembly to update Members on developments.

Department for Infrastructure

Vehicle Testing Services Update

Published at 10:30 am on Thursday 27 February 2020.

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): The current disruption to vehicle testing services at MOT centres from the 21st January because of difficulties with the operation of the lifts is unacceptable. My priority has been and remains the safety of DVA staff and customers. Since the moment I was notified of this issue, I have worked to minimise the disruption and to work as quickly as possible to return to a safe, fully operational service.

Over the past five weeks of this disruption, I have acted quickly to ensure all drivers could remain on the road. This included the immediate issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates, extended opening hours at MOT centres and the commissioning of two independent reviews to provide me with expert advice on the next steps.

I can now confirm that the first review, conducted by independent engineers, has concluded and an executive summary has now been published on my Department's website. The independent expert assessment on the condition of the existing lifts has recommended that all lifts exhibiting signs of fatigue are considered to be beyond their possible product life expectancy and should be replaced not repaired. This assessment ruled out the possibility of short term repairs due to the location of the fault and whilst a more complete replacement of the key parts, including the scissor legs, could be done this would have to be completed off site and would take as long as a full lift replacement. This would also create a risk that other parts of the repaired lifts may fail after reinstallation given the age of the equipment, which may lead to further disruption.

In considering the possibility of a lift replacement programme, Construction & Procurement Delivery (CPD) in the Department of Finance provided me with independent advice on the purchase of the lifts. The advice from CPD was that the quickest way to install new lifts was to use the existing contract. To use another supplier would significantly delay the installation of new lifts. I also sought further QC legal advice which confirmed to me that legal proceedings could be protracted, costly and would not guarantee a resolution for the public.

The audit investigation will conclude shortly but I have been assured by the lead auditor that, in her professional opinion, they have not identified anything which would indicate that new lifts should not be purchased from MAHA.

Therefore, on careful consideration of the range of options, including protracted legal action, I have decided based on expert engineering, audit, procurement and legal advice, to place an order with MAHA for 52 lifts through an accelerated production programme. New lifts will begin to be installed from late April, with all lifts to be in place by mid-July. The lifts will cost £1.8m and will be financed from DVA reserves which have been put aside for that purpose.

I am determined that lessons must be learnt and this must not happen again. Recommendations from all the findings from the various independent reports will be implemented. It is clear that an inadequate inspection regime and metal fatigue has led to this situation. Going forward measures will be put in place to ensure this issue can never arise

again. This includes the introduction of an improved equipment replacement cycle, a review of the contract management regime to be deployed by DVA with MAHA and improvements will be made to the maintenance and inspection regime and reporting by MAHA. Additional regular independent robust inspections and assurances will be arranged by DVA, adding an additional layer of protection. DVA will therefore now work with CPD and MAHA to put in place a revised maintenance and inspection contract from 1 April 2020 which will provide the necessary arrangements to ensure this type of incident does not occur again.

Until all the lifts are replaced and fully operational, I will ensure that all vehicles continue to be provided with the necessary cover to allow them to remain on the road; either through the issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates (TEC) or a priority appointment with the DVA for four year old vehicles, dealerships and taxis. Road safety is a priority for me and I want to emphasise the responsibility of road users to ensure their vehicles are roadworthy at all times, regardless of the current situation.

The advice to customers remains the same as currently and the priority vehicle contact line, for owners of four year old vehicles, taxis and car dealerships will continue to operate to make it easier for these vehicle owners to contact DVA for an urgent appointment. I have instructed my officials to ensure that there is clear and regular advice to, and communication with, the public as this situation progresses to full resolution.

While these steps will return our centres safely and swiftly to full operation, there is still more to do. This situation has brought to light the need to improve our MOT system and centres and I will be considering this over the coming months.

Finally, I appreciate that this has been a difficult time for both customers and staff. I want to pay tribute to the staff working in these challenging circumstances, with considerable uncertainty, as they continually seek to provide the best possible service to their customers. I hugely appreciate their commitment to their roles and thank them for their dedication, patience and loyalty at this difficult time. DVA sincerely apologises to all of those affected but the safety of staff and customers will always be the top priority.

Department of Health

Response to the Emergence of Coronavirus (2019 NCov) — Update

Published at 3.30 pm on Friday 28 February 2020.

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): Further to my statement on the 26 February on COVID-19, I wish to give Members a further update on recent local developments.

An individual who recently travelled to an affected area has had a presumptive positive result for COVID-19 on the 27th February. In line with established protocols, this test has been sent to Public Health England laboratories for verification. This is expected to take approximately 24 hours. The patient is receiving appropriate specialist health care in keeping with expert advice and agreed procedures. Public Health Agency personnel are working rapidly to identify any contacts the individual has had and that process is at an advanced stage of completion. Robust infection control measures are in place to prevent possible further spread of the virus.

As I have previously stated it was not unexpected that at some point we would have a positive case in Northern Ireland. We have been preparing for cases of COVID-19 and the Health Service is well used to managing infections and have robust infection control measures in place to respond immediately.

The advice to the public remains the same, members of the public who have symptoms and are concerned they may have COVID-19 are urged not to turn up at GP clinics or hospital Emergency Departments. They should instead contact their GP or GP out of hours. Advice will then be given on next steps, including testing if required. A helpline has also been established on 0300 200 7885 and is available 24/7 to provide advice. More general advice about coronavirus is available at the Public Health Agency website and NI Direct.

My Department and the Public Health Agency will continue to provide updated guidance to health care professionals and other Departments and their authorities, including schools, as and when necessary. The Chief Medical Officer is today briefing a number of school principals to underline the advice to schools.

It is important that we continue to remain calm and focused on containment at this point. The risk to individuals in Northern Ireland has not changed at this stage. We will however continue to plan and be ready for all eventualities.

My priority as Minister is to ensure that all effective measures continue to be put in place in Northern Ireland.

I will make an oral statement to the Assembly on Monday 2nd March to update Members on developments.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 14 February 2020

Written Answers

The Executive Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will support an invitation to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to visit Parliament Buildings and to address the Assembly to mark the centenary of the establishment of Northern Ireland and the first sitting of the Northern Ireland Parliament.

(AQW 205/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): In the absence of any specific proposal by the Assembly for such an invitation, and taking into account the prohibition in Standing Order 19(2)(e) on hypothetical questions, we do not consider it appropriate to respond in the terms requested.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding provided by the Executive to Foras na Gaeilge, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 317/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: Foras na Gaeilge is one of the two agencies which make up the North South Language Body. The Department for Communities (DfC), together with the Department for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) jointly funds Foras na Gaeilge. The respective DfC and DCHG contributions to Foras na Gaeilge, in each of the last five calendar years, are set out below:

Calendar Year	DfC Contribution (£stg)	DCHG Contribution (€ Euro)
2015	£2,840,641	€12,614,149.91
2016	£3,140,966	€12,527,548.37
2017	£3,285,812	€12,705,982.02
2018	£3,318,664	€12,619,990.45
2019	£3,309,404	€12,162,922.99

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what changes have been implemented to date in the operation of the Civil Service in light of the evidence given to the Renewable Heat Incentive Inquiry.

(AQW 616/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The Civil Service has developed and implemented a wide-ranging programme of change in response to the evidence presented to the Inquiry. The key issues being addressed include staffing, resourcing, training and development; the interface with Ministers and special advisers, and the role of the private office; public administration, record-keeping and governance; project delivery and management processes; financial management and control processes, encompassing procedures associated with the approval of business cases.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment on the lessons learnt following the publication of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 846/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: We note the publication of the Audit Office report and have accepted all of the recommendations. These have informed the continued delivery of the Social Investment Fund and the development and implementation of the Urban Villages Initiative and Communities in Transition Programme. Both have benefitted from a longer engagement process from the beginning with clearer communication, conflict of interest and audit processes established.

We also welcome the work being progressed by the Department of Finance on those recommendations concerning the wider civil service and public sector and in developing comprehensive guidance on conflicts of interest which will be disseminated for implementation in all future funding.

The audit report acknowledged that outcomes from some projects were promising and that value for money was likely to be achieved. Best practice and positive outcomes have been shared with other relevant departments to inform their future policy and/or funding considerations through workshops, seminars and shared information including films and case studies on the TEO website.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total costs of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition.
(AQW 943/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The total cost of the Commission's work to date is £741,359.51.

Mr McHugh asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their priorities in relation to New Decade, New Approach.
(AQO 7/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The parties forming the Executive have agreed a way forward to begin the task of strengthening public services and tackling immediate challenges in areas such as growing the economy, health, welfare, education and housing, and Brexit.

The Executive's immediate priorities are set out in more detail in Part 1 of the 'New Decade New Approach' agreement. These priorities provide the basis for an initial Programme for Government, at the heart of which is our aim of improving wellbeing for all.

Mr Humphrey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the proposed role of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.
(AQO 8/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The New Decade, New Approach agreement sets out the strategic aims of the new Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.

These include the promotion of:

- cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, including Northern Ireland's ethnic, national, linguistic and faith communities;
- building social cohesion and reconciliation so that everyone has a sense of belonging;
- building capacity and resilience on how we address our unresolved cultural identity issues; and
- celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland's rich cultural and linguistic heritage, recognising the equal validity and importance of all identities and traditions.
- Consideration is currently being given to the arrangements to bring forward the Rights, Language and Identity proposals in the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement, including the creation of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.

Further details will be made available to Members in due course.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans he has to address air pollution in the Stockmans Lane area, where measurements show high pollution levels.
(AQW 763/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Air pollution can have a serious effect on people's health. Exposure to air pollution can have long-term effects on health, it also has negative impacts on our environment.

In Northern Ireland, District Councils are responsible for reviewing the state of air quality in their district. They do this through monitoring air quality at a number of sites throughout Northern Ireland and the Department provides financial assistance to support this monitoring network.

The air quality monitoring station located at Stockmans Lane is operated by Belfast City Council and delivers long term automated monitoring of two pollutants associated with transport emissions: Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂); and particulate matter (PM₁₀). Generally, the levels measured at this location are within specified limits, however, from time to time exceedances for NO₂ have been recorded, particularly during extremely cold weather events with reduced wind speed, which reduces the rate of pollution dispersal.

In accordance with Northern Ireland legislation on air quality, Belfast City Council has drafted an Air Quality Management Plan for its district. This covers the period 2015 to 2020 and includes measures to declare Air Quality Management Areas in places where levels of NO₂ are found to be high. This includes the declaration of an AQMA for NO₂ on the Westlink Corridor. For information specifically regarding these AQMAs, I recommend that you contact Belfast City Council.

In addition to the DAERA and district Councils responsibilities, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) also has a role in managing transport.

DfI continues to identify, plan and implement measures to promote and enable a shift onto more sustainable modes of transport to reduce emissions and improve air quality. In the short term, it continues to support the Councils to help them deliver on their Air Quality Action Plans. In the medium term, DfI is currently preparing a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) for the greater Belfast area which will provide the framework for transport policy and investment decisions for the greater Belfast area up until 2035. Working in tandem with Councils' Local Development Plan processes, the intention is to encourage new development where people can walk, cycle or use public transport making use of existing or new transport facilities planned by DfI and providing opportunities to reduce congestion and emissions.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of the impact on the agriculture industry of leaving the European Union and whether he will make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 807/17-22)

Mr Poots: I appreciate the concerns caused by leaving the European Union. I will be making an announcement shortly on the arrangements and funding for Direct Payments in the 2020 Scheme Year, which I expect, will broadly operate in similar way to 2019.

In relation to future years, the Conservative Party manifesto stated that funding for farm support would be maintained at existing levels until the end of this Parliament. While the schemes themselves may change across the UK, I anticipate that funding levels will be maintained up until 2024.

My Department will continue to work on developing policy for the longer term. I will be looking at what future payments can do to support sustainable farming and our cultural landscape.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures have been put in place between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to ensure a common approach for agriculture post-Brexit.

(AQW 810/17-22)

Mr Poots: Work is ongoing across my Department to successfully manage the transition for my Department and the NI agri-food sector to a post exit environment. Part of this work will be to develop a new agricultural policy framework to best meet the future needs of the local industry.

Officials in my Department are in regular contact with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on issues of mutual importance. I expect these interactions to continue. As Minister, I will engage with my Irish counterparts when I have the opportunity or requirement to do so.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) how much was paid through the Basic Payment Scheme to claimants; (ii) the number of Basic Payment Scheme claimants, in the Upper Bann constituency for each year since 2015.

(AQW 1006/17-22)

Mr Poots: The number of Direct Payments, which incorporates the Basic Payment Scheme, Greening Payment and Young Farmers' Payment, and the relevant amounts, made to successful applicants in the Upper Bann constituency from the 2015 to 2019 scheme years, are detailed in the table below:

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Direct Payment recipients	872	795	778	762	746
BPS	£4,842,369	£5,492,891	£5,639,150	£5,477,736	£5,320,917
Greening	£2,149,030	£2,451,642	£2,526,167	£2,471,960	£2,422,800
Young Farmers' Payment	£132,109	£119,243	£130,141	£129,450	£130,406
Totals	£7,123,508	£8,063,776	£8,295,459	£8,079,146	£7,874,123

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a breakdown of legal fees incurred by his Department in respect of the RHI Inquiry, showing how much of the costs were attributable to providing representation and legal services in respect (i) politicians; (ii) civil servants; (iii) others; and (iv) the Department generally.

(AQW 1118/17-22)

Mr Poots: The total legal fees incurred amounted to £22,240.48.

In respect of fees for representation and legal services to politicians (i) and others (iii), no costs were incurred by the Department.

Fees of £11,550 were incurred for services relating to Civil Servants (ii) and £10,690.48 relating to the Department generally (iv).

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) how many acres of tree planting has been funded by his Department; and (ii) what proportion of this has been native deciduous woodland, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1161/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department has funded 1,005 hectares (2,482 acres) of new woodland in the last five years under the Rural Development Programme of which 39% or 392 hectares (968 acres) is native woodland.

The table below provides a breakdown of the woodland areas funded in each of the last five years and the percentage of which is native woodland.

Year	Area of all new woodland in ha (acres)	Area of new native woodland in ha (acres)	Percentage of new woodland which is native
2014/15	208 (514)	116 (287)	55%
2015/16	54 (133)	50 (123)	93%
2016/17	208 (514)	38 (94)	18%
2017/18	210 (519)	43 (106)	20%
2018/19	325 (802)	145 (358)	45%
Total	1,005 (2,482)	392 (968)	39%

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, following the recent pilot, whether his Department plans to further roll out the Rural Business Development Grant. (AQW 1205/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department is delivering the Rural Business Development Grant Pilot Scheme in partnership with ten Local Councils with project investment to be completed by 31 March 2020. An evaluation of the pilot scheme will be required to determine if there is sufficient need to further roll out the Rural Business Development Grant Pilot Scheme in the future. The evaluation will commence later this year.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has specific plans to raise awareness of the rate of mental health problems in the farming community. (AQW 1229/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme (TRPSI) helps raise awareness of the issue of mental health in farming and rural communities by funding: the Rural Support charity to operate a telephone helpline and signposting service for farmers and rural dwellers in stress; the Farm Families Health Checks Programme; and, the Spring Social Prescribing Project.

I am also working with Ministerial Colleagues on the Executive Working Group on Mental Well-Being and Resilience and I will ensure that the needs of rural dwellers, including farmers are taken into account as this work develops.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the number of farms with new outbreaks of Bovine TB, broken down by county, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1239/17-22)

Mr Poots: The table below sets out the total number of farms with new outbreaks of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in each of the last three calendar years, broken down by Divisional Veterinary Office area. A herd is defined as being a new bTB reactor herd if it had at least one bTB reactor in that year and no bTB reactor animals in the preceding 12 months. The information has been provided in this format as it is not held at county level.

Number of new bovine TB reactor herds

Year	Divisional Veterinary Office										
	Armagh	Ballymena	Cole-raine	Dun-gannon	Ennis-killen	L'Derry	Mallusk	Newry	N'Ards	Omagh	Total
2019*	174	122	211	190	218	29	128	304	209	172	1757
2018	191	147	286	264	262	53	96	302	247	241	2089
2017	214	158	239	292	246	39	120	365	245	290	2208

* 2019 figures provisional as numbers may change slightly for November/December months

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs why there was a reduced requirement in the Rural Development Programme totalling £1.5m resource and £900,000 capital in the Minister of Finance's statement to the Assembly on 27 January 2020.

(AQW 1261/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Resource reduced requirement of £1.5m was mainly due to the Department's ability to maximise the drawdown of additional EU funding in 2019-20 thereby freeing up national funding.

The Capital reduced requirement of £900,000 was due to fewer claims than anticipated on Tier 2 and a timing delay on the proposals for Tier 1 Tranche 3 of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 280/17-22, why have only seven Areas of Special Scientific Interest been designated in the last three years, including none in 2019.

(AQW 1302/17-22)

Mr Poots: Referring to my earlier response (AQW 1002/17-22), in recent years the primary focus of officials has been on the protection and management of our 394 designated sites, and bringing them under favourable management. Actions have included engaging with landowners and delivery partners in identifying appropriate management to attain favourable condition on the specific features of the site. I will be considering the way forward with regard to our designated site network with officials.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 467/17-22 1), (i) whether the 34 egg production units he refers to are enriched cage producers, or if that total includes the entire sector; and (ii) when were the enriched cage egg producers last inspected.

(AQW 1303/17-22)

Mr Poots: In total, there are approximately 380 egg production units in Northern Ireland. This includes organic, free range, barn and enriched cage production units. 34 units are enriched cage producers. All of those 34 units have been inspected between one to three times since 1 April 2019. The most recent inspection at an enriched cage production unit was on 30 January 2020.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on funding streams for farmers following the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

(AQW 1318/17-22)

Mr Poots: Following the passage of the necessary legislation by Parliament, I recently confirmed that the arrangements for £293million in Direct Payments for the 2020 scheme year are now in place. The 2020 scheme will operate in a similar fashion to that in 2019, apart from a small number of issues where change is necessary as a result of our exit from the EU.

In relation to future years, the Conservative Party manifesto stated that funding for farm support would be maintained at existing levels until the end of this Parliament. While the schemes themselves may change across the UK, I anticipate that funding levels will be maintained up until 2024.

With regards to the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, projects will continue to receive funding for the lifetime of the project, in line with letters of offer. This includes agreements issued until 31 December 2020, subject to individual scheme application windows and deadlines.

Given that we have now left the EU, the UK will not be part of the next Rural Development Programming period (2021-2027). My Department will continue to engage with Department of Finance in relation to securing EU replacement funding.

Dog Breeding Establishments: Checks

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) how many dog breeding establishments are registered with his Department; and (ii) how many unannounced checks have been carried out, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1375/17-22)

Mr Poots: Responsibility for licensing and inspecting dog breeding establishments rests with local councils under the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013.

Each council maintains a register of the licences it grants. My Department does not have access to the number of registered dog breeding establishments or to the number of inspections carried out, announced or otherwise. I have, however, instructed my officials to write to each council and ask that they supply this information directly to you.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, following a recent report that indicates that 39% of these were found to be in an unfavourable condition, what steps his Department is taking to improve the protection of Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

(AQW 1376/17-22)

Mr Poots: Protection of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) is generally associated with regulatory mechanisms. Relevant areas in which DAERA is active include improvements to data sets on flora, fauna and geological features to better inform planning and permitting decisions, reviewing guidance to public bodies on considering impacts on ASSIs, including the operational protocol on the assessment of air pollution impacts on sensitive habitats (ammonia/nitrogen deposition), as well as increased use of voluntary restoration agreements.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to list the Areas of Special Scientific Interest which have been destroyed, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1377/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Department are not aware of any Areas of Special Scientific Interest having been destroyed in the past five years.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether decisions on awarding or withholding marine construction licences in relation to (i) the proposed gas storage in salt caverns under Larne Lough; and (ii) the proposal outfall of leached material into the North Channel off Islandmagee, are a matter for the Marine Licensing Division and not subject to Ministerial decision.

(AQW 1384/17-22)

Mr Poots: The application for a marine construction licence in relation to the proposed gas storage project at Islandmagee is being considered by officials in DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division. NIEA Water Regulation Unit will consider the authorisation of the proposed brine discharge. The award or withholding of these consents will be subject to a Ministerial decision. This is due to the strategic nature of the proposed Islandmagee project.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline his Department's strategy for managing coastal erosion and coastal changes; (ii) whether he will seek to have coastal erosion considered within the Executive's strategy for climate change; and (iii) to detail any published reports since May 2016.

(AQW 1395/17-22)

Mr Poots:

- (i) My Department does not have a specific strategy on managing coastal erosion and coastal change, however these are included in wider Departmental policies. These include the Marine Policy Statement and the draft Marine Plan which provide a framework for any decision making that affects the Northern Ireland marine area. Additionally, the Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024 identifies actions that relate to coastal erosion
- (ii) I look forward to considering with my Executive colleagues how these policy frameworks can help inform climate change strategy.
- (iii) In January 2019, DAERA and DfI jointly published the 'Baseline Study and Gap Analysis of Coastal Erosion Risk Management NI'. This report made a number of recommendations and my Department is working with DfI and the Coastal Forum to develop a Coastal Forum work programme that can progress these recommendations. The report can be found at <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/coastal-erosion-risk-management-report-2019.pdf>. No other reports relating to this matter have been published.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the steps he is taking to ensure full transparency to any type of data collected or held by his Department on their (i) management plans; (ii) audits; (iii) nutrient management audits; and (iv) NIEA audits.

(AQW 1398/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department ensures full transparency to all the data and information it collects through proactive publication and disclosure on request, subject to any Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection Act exemptions/exceptions that may apply.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail the process of appeal for young people applying for the Young Farmers' Payment of Single Basic Payment Scheme; and (ii) whether his Department will provide specific feedback to the applicant in instances where applicants fail to satisfy that they (the applicant) are not head of the holding to the interview panel.

(AQW 1450/17-22)

Mr Poots: An applicant for the Young Farmers' Payment is informed in writing if their application is unsuccessful. If the applicant considers the decision is incorrect they can request a review of the decision, within 60 days, under the Department's review process.

A Case Officer will be assigned to review the decision and any supporting evidence provided. The Case Officer's assessment is a transparent process in which the applicant will be given the opportunity to consider a preliminary case report on the Case Officer's findings. The applicant can then supply additional evidence or comments before a final decision is made.

If the applicant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the Case Officer's assessment, they have the option to have the decision reviewed by an Independent Panel who will make a recommendation to the Department. The Department considers this recommendation carefully before making the final decision on the review. If the Department's original decision is overturned the £200 fee is reimbursed to the applicant.

The purpose of the young farmer interview is to assess whether or not the applicant is exercising effective and long-term control over the business in terms of decisions related to management, benefits and financial risks in relation to the business. The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate at interview that they meet these criteria through the examples they provide. Applicants who fail to provide this detail will be informed that they have not demonstrated to the Department's technical panel that they are exercising effective and long-term control over the business.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline the reasons for the sharp depletion in terrestrial and marine areas under favourable management from 2009 to present; and (ii) for his assessment of the impact this has had on biodiversity.

(AQW 1482/17-22)

Mr Poots: Area of protected sites under favourable management is a new biodiversity indicator that was developed to monitor progress under the draft Programme for Government Outcome 2 'We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment'. 'Favourable management' is defined as the necessary conservation actions to address the specific ecological requirements of a protected site, and is reported from 2015-16 onwards.

The most up to date figures for 2018-19 show an increase in the area of protected sites under favourable management, as presented in the recent Environmental Statistics Report Supplement (January 2020)

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/environmental-statistics-report-supplementary-publication-biodiversity-indicator-45>

Following a period of decline in the area of terrestrial sites under favourable management up to 2017-18, there has been a significant increase up to 145km² in 2018-19, largely due to the roll out of the Environmental Farming Scheme.

In the same period, the area of marine protected sites under favourable management increased from 71.22km² to 115km² and this increase is attributed to the prohibition of trawling and dredging in Rathlin SAC.

During this same period, when my Department was undertaking a programme of new designations, the total area of terrestrial protected sites increased from 1,384km² to 1,487km², while the total area of marine protected sites increased significantly from 269km² to 2566km². This affected the statistic around the proportion under favourable management and gave the appearance of a sharp depletion.

In light of this, it was agreed with the PfG Technical Assessment Panel, which is chaired by NISRA, that the biodiversity indicator would be reported as area of protected sites under favourable management, rather than as a percentage of protected area.

While the most recent reporting has shown that most of our habitats and species are still in unfavourable condition, my Department is progressing with various programmes to address this and bring more of our sites under favourable management.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline biodiversity decline, including (i) the overall numbers of animal decline; (ii) the specific species under threat; and (iii) other specific details held by the Department, in the last ten years.

(AQW 1515/17-22)

Mr Poots: Recent reports on specific habitats and species have evidenced biodiversity decline.

It is not possible to provide overall numbers of animals in decline as robust data are only available for a small proportion of species.

The Northern Ireland Priority Species list (currently under review) comprises 481 species of animals and plants requiring conservation action due to their decline, rarity and importance in Irish and UK contexts. The list can be accessed at the following link:

- https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/search?q=*&fq=listMembership_m_s:%22Northern%20Ireland%20Priority%20Species%22&compact=true

Last year's UK Habitats Directive report indicates that the majority of NI habitats continue to be in 'unfavourable-bad' conservation status, with only 1 out of the 49 habitats in favourable condition. Last year's Birds Directive report (a UK report, not broken down by country), indicated that 34% of species' population sizes are increasing and 20% stable, while 41% are declining. Fewer species are increasing in the short-term, indicating recent overall negative change. These reports, which my Department helped compile, can be accessed at the following links:-

- <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/article-17-habitats-directive-report-2019-habitats/>
- <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/article-17-habitats-directive-report-2019-species/>
- <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/article-12-report-2019/>

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) whether he will commit to adopting a strategic approach to woodland expansion to ensure that peatlands and other semi-natural habitats are not negatively impacted; and (ii) what measures he is considering to ensure that any new tree planting (a) does not lead to poorly sited afforestation; (b) consists of native tree species; and (c) will not negatively impact breeding waders.

(AQW 1530/17-22)

Mr Poots: The UK Forestry Standard, which is adopted by my Department, provides the strategic basis on which all woodland expansion is funded. The Standard sets out legal and sustainable forestry management requirements and guidelines.

The legal requirements include regulatory protection under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended) for important habitats and priority species, such as breeding waders as you refer.

The Standard includes requirements and guidelines for woodland expansion to avoid peat soils and sites that would compromise adjacent bog or wetland habitats; to assess the potential impacts on priority habitats and species; and to have a diversity of trees and structure within woodland design, including native tree species. In implementing the requirements of the Standard, almost 40% of trees planted in new woodland over the last five years were native tree species.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he plans to introduce a deposit return scheme.

(AQW 1534/17-22)

Mr Poots: The introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme, in conjunction with England and Wales, is currently under consideration. Engagement with industry members including retailers, manufacturers, district councils, waste management companies and other organisations and business has been ongoing and will continue through planned workshops and Stakeholder events. A further detailed public consultation setting out options will be launched by autumn 2020.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail plans to add stock to the lake at Loughgall Country Park.

(AQW 1557/17-22)

Mr Poots: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has planned to stock the lake with 150 Carp approximately of 6lbs weight each in February 2020.

There are no other future stockings planned at this time.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he will commit to legislating for a climate change act within the current Assembly mandate.

(AQW 1605/17-22)

Mr Poots: I refer you to my previous response to AQW 308/17-22.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline the reasons for the depletion in (a) terrestrial; and (b) marine areas under favourable management, from 2009 to present; and (ii) for his assessment of the impact this has had on biodiversity.

(AQW 1606/17-22)

Mr Poots: Area of protected sites under favourable management is a new biodiversity indicator that was developed to monitor progress under the draft Programme for Government Outcome 2 'We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment'. 'Favourable management' is defined as the necessary conservation actions to address the specific ecological requirements of a protected site, and is reported from 2015-16 onwards.

The most up to date figures for 2018-19 show an increase in the area of protected sites under favourable management, as presented in the recent Environmental Statistics Report Supplement (January 2020)

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/environmental-statistics-report-supplementary-publication-biodiversity-indicator-45>

Following a period of decline in the area of terrestrial sites under favourable management up to 2017-18, there has been a significant increase up to 145km² in 2018-19, largely due to the roll out of the Environmental Farming Scheme.

In the same period, the area of marine protected sites under favourable management increased from 71.22km² to 115km² and this increase is attributed to the prohibition of trawling and dredging in Rathlin SAC.

During this same period, when my Department was undertaking a programme of new designations, the total area of terrestrial protected sites increased from 1,384km² to 1,487km², while the total area of marine protected sites increased significantly from 269km² to 2566km². This affected the statistic around the proportion under favourable management and gave the appearance of a sharp depletion.

In light of this, it was agreed with the PfG Technical Assessment Panel, which is chaired by NISRA, that the biodiversity indicator would be reported as area of protected sites under favourable management, rather than as a percentage of protected area.

While the most recent reporting has shown that most of our habitats and species are still in unfavourable condition, my Department is progressing with various programmes to address this and bring more of our sites under favourable management.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the delays to the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System.
(AQW 1658/17-22)

Mr Poots: In 2016 the Department entered into a contractual arrangement with AMT Sybex, a subsidiary of Capita, to deliver a new information system for food animals in Northern Ireland. The purpose of NIFAIS is to record food animal movements, and support the Department's programmes for animal disease control, public health assurance, consumer assurance and international market access. It will replace the Department's Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS).

NIFAIS software is being delivered in stages. Early elements of the software went live in 2017 however there is a delay in the implementation of the remaining software due to the production of functionality which has failed to meet the Department's requirements.

Departmental officials continue to work with AMT-Sybex to resolve the issues that have delayed implementation. I am assured that animal movement services are being delivered via APHIS, which continues to meet our stakeholders' needs.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a definition and distinction between (i) sites designated as 'protected', relating to biodiversity and habitat protection; and (ii) sites under 'favourable conservation status'.
(AQW 1682/17-22)

Mr Poots: Sites are designated because of the features of habitat, species or earth science contained, and as a result are afforded legal protection.

Under the EC Habitats Directive, Favourable Conservation Status is where a habitat type or species is prospering (in both quality and extent/ population) and with good prospects to continue to do so in the future. It applies to habitats and species prescribed in the Annexes to the Directive, not sites.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when the new Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System will be completed and launched.
(AQW 1731/17-22)

Mr Poots: In 2016 the Department entered into a contractual arrangement with AMT Sybex, a subsidiary of Capita, to deliver a new information system for food animals in Northern Ireland. The purpose of NIFAIS is to record food animal movements, and support the Department's programmes for animal disease control, public health assurance, consumer assurance and international market access, and will replace the Department's Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS).

NIFAIS software is being delivered in stages. Early elements of the software went live in 2017 however there is a delay in the implementation of the remaining software due to the production of functionality which has failed to meet the Department's requirements.

Departmental officials continue to work with AMT-Sybex to resolve the issues that have delayed implementation. The Department is not currently in a position to confirm a launch date for the completed NIFAIS programme. I am assured that animal movement services are being delivered via APHIS, which continues to meet our stakeholders' needs.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail any communications between his Department and InfraStrata PLC regarding InfraStrata's press statement on 07 February 2020 announcing the extension of the public consultation for Marine Licence Application ML 28_12 to 23 March 2020.
(AQW 1847/17-22)

Mr Poots: DAERA officials had sight of the draft InfraStrata press statement and advised them that references to the Department were incorrect. Officials subsequently advised InfraStrata that DAERA could not agree, at that stage, to the references to an extension to the consultation contained in the company's draft press release.

Department for Communities

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities when the Scott Review of the Charity Commission, initiated in 2016 and now complete, will be published.
(AQW 345/17-22)

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities): An internal governance review of the Charity Commission was taken forward by officials in 2016 to consider assurance regarding the approach of the Charity Commission to regulation activities, its overall governance arrangements and the relationships between the Department and the Commission, and the Commission and the Executive. The review was never finalised, or presented to the former Minister.

This internal review is now out of date and no longer relevant to current issues and circumstances. I will consider whether I wish to commission any future review of the Charity Commission in the context of the current High Court Appeal case and new governance arrangements which are currently being implemented for all arm's length bodies.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) why her Department has yet to publish the Scott Review of the Charity Commission; and (ii) when it will be published.
(AQW 346/17-22)

Ms Hargey: An internal governance review of the Charity Commission was taken forward by officials in 2016 to consider assurance regarding the approach of the Charity Commission to regulation activities, its overall governance arrangements and the relationships between the Department and the Commission, and the Commission and the Executive. The review was never finalised, or presented to the former Minister.

This internal review is now out of date and no longer relevant to current issues and circumstances. I will consider whether I wish to commission any future review of the Charity Commission in the context of the current High Court Appeal case and new governance arrangements which are currently being implemented for all arm's length bodies.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Communities for a breakdown of the arts budget for the last four years.
(AQW 456/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Distribution of funding for the Arts is primarily delivered through the Arts Council, which is in receipt of funding from the Department and the National Lottery. My Department also provides funding for NI Screen and the Community Festivals Fund.

The following table details the Departmental opening budget allocations for the last four years. A breakdown of the Arts Council allocations can be seen on their website at www.artscouncil-ni.org.

	2016-17 (£k)	2017-18 (£k)	2018-19 (£k)	2019-20 (£k)
Arts Council Resource	10,300	9,888	10,092	10,197
Arts Council Capital	0	35	858	954
Creative Industries (1)	189	37	0	0
Other Arts Grants (2)	1,901	1,825	1,813	2,132
Totals	12,390	11,785	12,763	13,283

Notes: (1) Delivery on Creative Industries transferred to Arts Council in 2018 therefore this funding is now included in the Arts Council resource figures. (2) Funding for NI Screen and Community Festivals Fund.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has plans to address the practice of letting agents charging letting fees in relation to the rental of properties.
(AQW 460/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Housing, and in particular the role and regulation of the Private Rented Sector, is one of my priorities. The Department is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector to ensure the regulatory framework and supporting policy improve standards for the benefit of both tenants and landlords. The areas being reviewed include:

- Supply
- Affordability
- Security of tenure
- Tenancy management
- Property standards
- Dispute resolution

The Review will also include consideration of regulation of letting agents, including if further legislation is required to prevent letting agents charging tenants unfair fees.

A court ruling in December 2017 found that existing Department of Finance legislation, the Commission on Disposal of Land (NI) Order 1986, prohibits letting agents from charging a tenant fees for services carried out on behalf of a landlord. The result of the court case was publicised by Housing Rights and by my Department through the Landlord Newsletter. I am currently giving consideration to further communication on this to the sector.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Mid, South and West region growth deal.
(AQW 535/17-22)

Ms Hargey: An update on the Mid, South and West region growth deal can be accessed from the following web address:

<https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/?s=region+deal>

It is understood that the three councils of the Mid, South and West region are working together to develop a strategic economic plan focused on improving productivity; creating more and better jobs; addressing economic infrastructure; growing investment; supporting business innovation and improving skills.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Communities what plans she has to address social housing needs in (i) Lurgan; (ii) Portadown; and (iii) Banbridge.

(AQW 597/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge, there have been 20 social housing units completed to-date in 2019/20 as outlined in Table 1 below, with a further 13 social housing units currently under construction as outlined in Table 2 below.

Furthermore, there are 33 social housing units programmed to start through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2019/20 – 2021/22 as outlined in Table 3 attached.

Programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons for example relating to delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure Planning Permission. Additional schemes can also be added to the SHDP in-year through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory / Off-the-shelf properties.

Table 1: Social housing completions to-date in 2019/20 (20 units)

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
South Ulster	50 Grattan Street	Lurgan	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	Urban	1	2018/19	2019/20
Choice	Edward Street	Portadown	Reimprovement	Leaving Penal	Supported	15	2016/17	2019/20
Habinteg	Oak Lodge	Banbridge	Off The Shelf	General Needs	Urban	4	2018/19	2019/20

Table 2: Social housing units under construction (13 units)

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
South Ulster	37 Gilpins Mews	Lurgan	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	Urban	1	2019/20	2019/20
South Ulster	148 Garvaghy Road	Portadown	New Build	General Needs	Urban	10	2018/19	2019/20
South Ulster	148 Garvaghy Road	Portadown	New Build	Wheelchair	Urban	2	2018/19	2019/20

Table 3: Programmed to start through Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2019/20 – 2021/22 (33 units)

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Choice	39 Woodlands Manor	Portadown	Rehabilitation	General Needs	Urban	1	2019/20	2020/21
Clanmil	186 Ballynamoney Road	Lurgan	New Build / Re-hab	General Needs	Urban	3	2019/20	2020/21
South Ulster	Kilwilkie Road	Lurgan	New Build	General Needs	Urban	16	2019/20	2020/21
South Ulster	46/48/50 Fort Street	Banbridge	Rehabilitation	Elderly CAT1	Urban	3	2019/20	2019/20

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Choice	Scarva Street (Surplus Public Site)	Banbridge	New Build	General Needs	Urban	10	2020/21	2021/22

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities to outline any plans she has to recognise local motorsport competitors who had success in 2019.

(AQW 758/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I can confirm that local athletes and teams, including motorsport competitors, who have been successful in their sport in 2019, will be invited to my Department's Annual Celebration of Sport event.

Successful athletes and teams are identified via Sport NI and daily monitoring of media coverage within my Department.

This year's event will be held in Omagh Leisure Complex on 24 April and will provide an opportunity for successful athletes to meet and inspire local school children.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities how many legal claims have been made for the absence of cavity wall insulation in NI Housing Executive properties since 2016.

(AQW 816/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has confirmed it has received one public liability claim since 2016, in relation to the absence of cavity wall insulation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Loughview area of Holywood, over the next two years.

(AQW 905/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The table below details the maintenance schemes that the Housing Executive have planned for the Loughview area of Holywood over the next two years.

Scheme	20/21	21/22
Heating	Hollywood Estates (Originally installed in 05/06)	Bangor Previous Refusals
		Hollywood Estates (Originally installed in 06/07)
External Wall Insulation		Abbey Ring / West Link, Loughview

The Housing Executive has advised that these schemes are subject to the availability of finance, the necessary scheme approvals being obtained and appropriate contractor capacity being available to carry out the works.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for the Breezemount area in North Down over the next two years.

(AQW 907/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The table below details the maintenance schemes that the Housing Executive have planned for the Breezemount area of North Down over the next two years.

Scheme	20/21	21/22
Double Glazing	Breezemount / Conlig	

The Housing Executive has advised that these schemes are subject to the availability of finance, the necessary scheme approvals being obtained and appropriate contractor capacity being available to carry out the works.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for the Strand area of Holywood, over the next two years.

(AQW 908/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The table below details the maintenance schemes that the Housing Executive have planned for the Strand area of Holywood over the next two years.

Scheme	20/21	21/22
Heating	Hollywood (Originally installed in 05/06) Estates	

The Housing Executive has advised that this scheme is subject to the availability of finance, the necessary scheme approvals being obtained and appropriate contractor capacity being available to carry out the works.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Conlig, over the next two years.

(AQW 909/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The table below details the maintenance schemes that the Housing Executive have planned for Conlig, North Down over the next two years.

Scheme	20/21	21/22
Bathrooms		Conlig Bathrooms
Heating		Bangor Previous Refusals
		Hollywood (Originally Installed in 06/07) Estates
Double Glazing	Breezemount / Conlig	

The Housing Executive has advised that these schemes are subject to the availability of finance, the necessary scheme approvals being obtained and appropriate contractor capacity being available to carry out the works.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the current number of people waiting for adaptations to their Housing Executive homes; and (ii) the length of time they have been waiting, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 954/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Please see Table 1 for major adaptations including waiting times; please see Table 2 for stair and vertical lifts including waiting times; please see Table 3 for minor adaptations including waiting times.

Table 1: Major adaptations currently awaiting completion

*From received date to completion

Constituency	0-3 m	4-6m	7-9m	10-12m	13-15m	16-18m	19-24m	25-30m	31-36m	37-48m	49-60m	60+m	Total
Belfast East	3	2	0	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	0	0	17
Belfast North	1	1	1	1	2	1	4	2	1	0	0	0	14
Belfast South	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	7
Belfast West	4	3	6	4	6	9	4	2	2	5	0	0	45
East Antrim	0	0	2	1	4	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	13
East L/Derry	0	5	6	6	2	1	6	2	1	3	0	0	32
Ferm & South Tyrone	0	2	4	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	13
Foyle	6	4	8	6	3	6	9	6	1	0	4	0	53
Lagan Valley	0	2	2	0	3	2	3	3	2	1	0	0	18
Mid Ulster	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Newry & Armagh	0	6	2	3	2	1	3	2	1	0	1	0	21
Antrim North	0	9	1	3	2	0	5	2	1	0	0	0	23
Antrim South	0	0	4	4	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	14
North Down	2	2	6	0	3	4	5	1	1	3	0	0	27
South Down	0	4	2	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	12
Strangford	2	2	4	2	2	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	20

Constituency	0-3 m	4-6m	7-9m	10-12m	13-15m	16-18m	19-24m	25-30m	31-36m	37-48m	49-60m	60+m	Total
Upper Bann	3	1	2	1	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	15
West Tyrone	5	1	5	1	2	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	24
Total	29	46	58	38	40	36	57	28	20	17	7	1	377

Table 2: Stair and vertical lift installations currently awaiting completion

*From received date to completion

Constituency	0-3 m	4-6m	Total
Belfast East	2	1	3
Belfast North	2	0	2
Belfast South	0	0	0
Belfast West	5	0	5
East Antrim	6	0	6
East L/Derry	1	0	1
Ferm & South Tyrone	1	0	1
Foyle	2	0	2
Lagan Valley	2	0	2
Mid Ulster	1	0	1
Newry & Armagh	0	0	0
Antrim North	2	0	2
Antrim South	8	0	8
North Down	1	0	1
South Down	0	0	0
Strangford	0	0	0
Upper Bann	4	0	4
West Tyrone	2	0	2
Total	39	1	40

Table 3: Minor adaptations currently awaiting completion

*From received date to completion

Constituency	0-3 m	4-6m	7-9m	10-12m	13-15m	16-18m	19-24m	25-30m	31-36m	37-48m	49-60m	60+m	Total
Belfast East	22	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29
Belfast North	35	5	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45
Belfast South	10	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Belfast West	46	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50
East Antrim	26	4	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	38
East L/Derry	40	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	41
Ferm & South Tyrone	28	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Foyle	47	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	49
Lagan Valley	23	17	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	47

Constituency	0-3 m	4-6m	7-9m	10-12m	13-15m	16-18m	19-24m	25-30m	31-36m	37-48m	49-60m	60+m	Total
Mid Ulster	20	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26
Newry & Armagh	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Antrim North	29	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
Antrim South	29	7	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	41
North Down	11	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
South Down	14	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Strangford	42	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	47
Upper Bann	25	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29
West Tyrone	34	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	37
Total	499	70	24	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	608

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities whether she plans to reform the discretionary support scheme eligibility criteria.

(AQW 955/17-22)

Ms Hargey: As Discretionary Support has been operational for more than two years, my Department had already considered that this was a suitable time to begin a formal and detailed analysis of the original policy. While there was no legislative requirement to review Discretionary Support at this juncture, several key issues inviting further investigation had been identified by officials. This internal policy review has been taken forward by a specially convened Policy Review Steering Group, which has recently completed its consideration of the detailed policy options presented to it.

In order to allow for input from key stakeholders and members of the public, further consultation on this review is under consideration. A timeframe for this is still to be confirmed.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Communities when the (i) kitchen; (ii) bathroom; and (iii) electrical work schemes in Anderson Park, Limavady, will (a) begin; and (b) be completed.

(AQW 976/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive currently has a Bathroom/Kitchen/Rewire scheme programmed for the Anderson Park properties in 2027/28. It is not possible to provide exact start and completion dates at this time.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Communities how many people over the age of 16 are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in Upper Bann.

(AQW 1010/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The most recent Disability Living Allowance statistics were published in November 2019 and covered the period up to 24 August 2019. At that date 4010 people over age 16 were receiving Disability Living Allowance in the Upper Bann Assembly Area.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Communities how many people are in receipt of a Personal Independence Payment in Upper Bann.

(AQW 1011/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The most recent Personal Independence Payment statistics were published in November 2019 and covered the period up to 31 August 2019. At that date, there were 9,150 people receiving Personal Independence Payment in Upper Bann.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Communities how many people are in receipt of Universal Credit in Upper Bann.

(AQW 1012/17-22)

Ms Hargey: As of 31st August 2019 there were 3,870 people in receipt of Universal Credit in the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency.

The Department publishes quarterly statistics on Universal Credit. This includes geographical information. The latest publication can be found at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/universal-credit-statistics>

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline the support available for benefit claimants to become self-employed; (ii) to detail how the funding for these schemes compares to provision in GB; and (iii) whether she plans to introduce a scheme equivalent to the New Enterprise Allowance, which is available in GB.

(AQW 1013/17-22)

Ms Hargey: To support new businesses to become profitable, newly self-employed claimants to Universal Credit may receive a 'start-up period' of up to one year where they will continue to receive Universal Credit payments based on their circumstances. During this period claimants will not be required to look for or take up other work and their Universal Credit payments will only be subject to a tapered earnings deduction if the business is profitable, taking any previous losses into account.

During a start-up period a claimant will continue to receive tailored support from a work coach at quarterly interventions designed to monitor and encourage further business growth.

Work coaches in Jobs & Benefits offices are trained to assist individuals who are interested in becoming self-employed.

Support is tailored to the needs of each individual and initially claimants will be encouraged to take steps to explore the viability of their business idea. Work coaches have access to external sources of advice and support for self-employed claimants. They will actively sign post claimants to online resources, local councils and enterprise agencies who can provide expert business advice and will assist them to develop their business.

Available support includes:

- Go For It Programme
- Enterprise NI Start Up Loans
- Princes Trust Explore Enterprise Programme for those aged 16 – 30
- Yes You Can business start-up and growth support for women

A comparison is not possible as currently no equivalent scheme is facilitated.

My Department is currently considering options in respect to self-employment and how best to assist people in this category.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Communities what remit she has over the reassessment of benefits for people who have degenerative or progressive conditions.

(AQW 1019/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to ensuring people with severe and/or progressive conditions do not go through unnecessary assessments for benefit purposes.

From September 2017, my Department put in place new arrangements whereby people who have been diagnosed with a profound lifelong medical condition, with minimal fluctuations and no prospect of recovery despite treatment, will not be subject to reassessment under the Work Capability Assessment process. This applies to both new and existing Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit claims.

In August 2018 my Department also introduced enhancements to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) whereby those who have degenerative or progressive conditions and who had been awarded the highest level of PIP, and whose needs are unlikely to change, receive an on-going award with only a 'light touch' review at the 10 year point.

These particular changes remove the need for unnecessary assessments for people with severe and/or progressive conditions.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the statistics on the number of successful Personal Independence Payment appeals.

(AQW 1127/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Since the introduction of PIP on 20 June 2016 just over 200,000 PIP decisions have been made. Approximately 10% of these decisions have proceeded to appeal. The number of decisions overturned at Appeal represents 3% of all decisions made.

Decisions overturned are primarily because either additional evidence was presented at the Tribunal which was not available to the officer who made the decision, or that the Tribunal took a different view of the evidence available to the Department when the decision was made, with neither conclusion being unreasonable.

At every stage of the PIP claims and disputes process, people are encouraged to provide the Department with any evidence they have that may support their claim and inform the decision making process. The Department will reconsider the decision if additional evidence is received and revise it where appropriate.

My Department is committed to ensuring that decisions made are right first time and a number of improvements have been introduced or are about to be introduced following a number of independent reviews both here and in Great Britain to enhance the service.

In seeking improvements to the decision-making process, my Department has in place a feedback mechanism that includes analysis of overturned appeals and the findings are regularly discussed internally and with Capita who provide the PIP Assessment Service.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has any plans to extend the Areas at Risk programmes.

(AQW 1138/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Areas at Risk programme was introduced in 2006 and is currently targeting 16 areas across the North. My Department is currently assessing applications for funding for the existing Areas at Risk for the 2020/21 financial year. Decisions on funding for each area/project will be made by 31 March 2020.

It has been recognised that this programme, like others, seeks to build capacity within communities in areas of deprivation and has similar aims and objectives to People and Place: A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and its associated Neighbourhood Renewal and Small Pockets of Deprivation Programmes.

As a result a current review of People and Place has included the Areas at Risk programme. Officials are currently engaging with a range of stakeholders on the nature and scope of the review so as to enhance delivery of these existing programmes and their future within the context of the Anti-poverty Strategy.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has any plans to renovate derelict buildings for use as social housing.

(AQW 1139/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department supports Housing Associations to bring forward social housing schemes within existing properties in areas of Housing Need. The Housing Association Guide, which directs Housing providers development and grant support requirements outlines how buildings might be brought back into use for social housing. The Acquisition and Works (Rehabilitation) procurement approach is specifically designed to allow existing dwellings, which require substantial repair and improvement, conversion or extension to be acquired for social housing where it is financially viable to do so.

In addition, the Empty Homes Strategy 2013-2018 has undergone an internal review and my Department is currently exploring how the findings will help inform future policy interventions on bringing empty homes back into use.

You may also wish to note that the responsibility for dealing with dangerous and dilapidated buildings rests with the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Further details on their role can be accessed at the following link - <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/dilapidation>

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Communities which targets have not been met from the Sport Matters: The NI Strategy of Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019.

(AQW 1147/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Sport Matters, The NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, was published in 2009 following formal endorsement by the NI Executive. The status of the Sport Matters targets are reported on by the Sport Matters Implementation Groups and are published on my Department's website.

The most recent report from December 2018 is available at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/sport-matters-implementation-group-progress-report-01-oct-2017-30-sep-2018 and showed that:

- 13 targets had been achieved;
- 11 targets were on track for achievement; and
- 1 target was on track for achievement, but with some delay or uncertainty.

A new strategy for sport and physical activity is currently being developed.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities when applications will be accepted for funding under the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.

(AQW 1159/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to delivering the Sub Regional Stadia Programme which was included in the "New Decade, New Approach" Agreement and is a priority for my Department.

A 12-week consultation on Programme proposals, based on an IFA Facility Strategy dated 2011, closed on 22 February 2016. However, in the absence of Ministers, no decisions were made on Programme proposals including the application process.

The consultation closed in 2016 and was based on an IFA strategy that is now nine years old, therefore it is important to review the Programme in light of changes impacting football at various levels.

I have asked my officials to urgently engage with key strategic stakeholders to help inform the development of detailed plans for delivering a successful Sub Regional Stadia Programme.

Once this engagement has been completed, I will then consider proposals on how best to take the Programme forward.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities to outline the procedure for Stage One and Stage Two applications lodged under the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.

(AQW 1160/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to delivering the Sub Regional Stadia Programme which was included in the “New Decade, New Approach” Agreement and is a priority for my Department.

A 12-week consultation on Programme proposals, based on an IFA Facility Strategy dated 2011, closed on 22 February 2016. However, in the absence of Ministers, no decisions were made on Programme proposals, procedures or on financial allocations.

With regard to the procedures to be followed for submitting applications, they have to be developed and must be open, transparent and stand up to scrutiny whilst ensuring that health and safety, accessibility and inclusion are prioritised.

The IFA strategy on which the consultation was based is now nine years old, therefore it is important to review the Programme to ensure that it addresses the current and future needs of the game.

I have asked my officials to urgently engage with key strategic stakeholders to help inform the development of detailed plans for delivering a successful Sub Regional Stadia Programme.

Once this engagement has been completed, I will then consider proposals on how best to take the Programme forward.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities (i) why she has designated the Regional Stadia Casement Park project as a key priority to be started at the earliest opportunity and concluded with pace and the Sub-Regional Football Stadia Programme in need of fresh consultation, despite the New Decade, New Approach prioritisation of both programmes for completion; (ii) why the Sub-Regional Football Stadia Programme requires a fresh consultation when a full public consultation has already been completed; (iii) why her Department has not published an analysis of the public consultation; and (iv) when her Department will publish an analysis of the public consultation.

(AQW 1169/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to delivering both the Casement Park project and the Sub Regional Stadia Programme which were included in the “New Decade, New Approach” Agreement and are priorities for my Department.

The Executive endorsed funding for the Regional Stadia Programme as a priority during the CSR period 2011-15 in March 2011. The Programme was to assist in developing the regional stadiums of soccer, Gaelic games and rugby. It has delivered the redevelopment of Kingspan Stadium and Windsor Park Stadium with Casement Park being the third and final project of the Regional Stadia Programme. The Casement Park Redevelopment commenced in 2011 and work has continued since then to progress the project as a recognised Executive priority.

In relation to the Sub Regional Stadium Programme, while the Executive endorsed funding for stadia development within association football it was to be taken forward in the CSR 2015 period, subject to funding being secured. Ministerial decisions were not taken in relation to Programme proposals, financial allocations or on the publication of the consultation report.

Given that the IFA strategy on which the consultation was based is now nine years old, I think it is important to review the Programme to ensure that it will best meet the current and future needs of the game.

I have asked my officials to urgently engage with key strategic stakeholders including the IFA, the NI Football League and representatives from District Councils to help inform the development of detailed plans for delivering a successful Sub Regional Stadia Programme.

Once this engagement has been completed and the review has taken place I will consider how best to take the Programme forward.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities for an update on Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

(AQW 1173/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department for Communities is promoting and supporting the development of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as a key component of its commitment to help strengthen the competitiveness of our towns and cities.

To date 8 BIDs have been established with funding and support from DfC: Ballymena, Coleraine, Enniskillen, Newry, Strabane and three in Belfast; Belfast One in the city centre, Destination CQ in the Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BID.

These BID areas (involving over 5,000 businesses) are expected to bring in a total investment of more than £17 million over their 5 year term.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities how frequently the Motorsport Taskforce meets; and what current actions it is undertaking.

(AQW 1203/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Motorsport Taskforce was established in January 2017 with Ian Paisley M.P. appointed as the Independent Chair.

The Taskforce met on thirteen occasions between January 2017 and June 2019. These included meetings with a range of stakeholders including representatives of Governing Bodies, competitors and event organisers from other countries.

The Taskforce published an Interim Report in August 2018 and produced a final Report and Economic Impact Assessment in June 2019. The work of the Taskforce concluded with the official launch of the Taskforce Report on 28 June 2019.

The Department has continued to support the 2&4 Wheel Motorsport Group, the umbrella organisation of Motorsports Governing Bodies, with the development of a strategy for motorsport which was a key recommendation in the Report. I understand that the strategy is almost complete and that the Motorsport Group plan to publish it in due course.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Communities to list the stadia that received funding in the last ten years, to include (i) the fund from which money was granted; (ii) how much was granted; and (iii) the purpose of the grant.

(AQW 1268/17-22)

Ms Hargey: As part of the Executive's £110 million Regional Stadia programme, the Department for Communities has provided funding for the following stadia:

From 2012 to 2015, £15,900,000 was provided to Irish Rugby Football Association (IRFU) for the redevelopment of the Kingspan Stadium at Ravenhill. This investment included £560,000 for the upgrading of the training facilities used by the IRFU at Aquinas Grammar School;

From 2012 to 2016, £28,750,000 was provided to the Irish Football Association for the redevelopment of the National Stadium at Windsor Park which included £2,750,000 towards the development of the Olympia Leisure Facility; and

From 2012 to date, £10,276,000 has been provided to the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) for the redevelopment of Casement Park.

From 2009 to date, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, has provided £7,565,204 for the development of stadia. A breakdown of the funding provided is detailed at Annex A.

Annex A

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Annagh United FC	06/03/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£4,163	Exchequer
	17/06/2013	Sports Matter Community Capital Programme	3G Pitch with Floodlighting	£245,000	Exchequer
Armagh City FC	28/02/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£3,616	Exchequer
	10/05/2013	Sports Matter Community Capital Programme	3G pitch (floodlighting currently exists at site)	£245,000	Exchequer
	09/12/2010	Soccer Strategy	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities Programme	£84,080	Exchequer
Armagh GAA County Board	30/03/2010	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£256,196	Exchequer
	30/03/2010	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£551,804	Exchequer
	14/01/2020	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£27,682	Exchequer
	09/01/2020	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£16,865	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Ballinamallard United FC	11/03/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£24,800	Exchequer
Ballyclare Comrades FC	07/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,970	Exchequer
	07/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,682	Exchequer
	06/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£19,140	Exchequer
	27/11/2019	Health & Safety	Communications - Designated Grounds	£6,175	Exchequer
Ballymena Borough Council	21/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£12,940	Exchequer
Ballymena United FC	10/03/2010	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£250,015	Exchequer
	10/03/2010	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£557,985	Exchequer
	14/01/2020	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£22,998	Exchequer
	10/03/2010	Soccer Strategy	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities Programme	£217,035	Exchequer
Ballymoney Borough Council	10/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,972	Exchequer
	14/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£30,000	Exchequer
Bangor FC	06/03/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£3,958	Exchequer
	18/06/2013	Sports Matter Community Capital Programme	3G Pitch	£245,000	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Belfast Harlequins	13/01/2020	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£26,400	Exchequer
Carrick Rangers FC	10/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£22,849	Exchequer
Carrick Rangers FC	23/02/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,911	Exchequer
	25/10/2011	Sports Matter Community Capital Programme	Upgrade of grass pitch to 3G (110m x 65m)	£245,000	Exchequer
	11/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£19,576	Exchequer
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	18/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£20,000	Exchequer
Cliftonville FC	30/01/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£7,850	Exchequer
	29/11/2019	Health & Safety	Provision of CCTV	£19,785	Exchequer
Coleraine FC	05/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,850	Exchequer
	07/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£37,217	Exchequer
	26/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£19,105	Exchequer
Crewe United Football & Sports Club	05/03/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£4,920	Exchequer
	15/03/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£28,500	Exchequer
	05/01/2018	Single Facility Fund	Upgrade of a grass pitch to a 3G. (Floodlighting, fencing and changing already exist at site).	£122,000	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Crewe United Football & Sports Club	05/01/2018	Single Facility Fund	Upgrade of a grass pitch to a 3G. (Floodlighting, fencing and changing already exist at site).	£96,417	Lottery
	05/01/2018	Single Facility Fund	Development costs associated with the upgrade of a grass pitch to a 3G. (Floodlighting, fencing and changing already exist at site).	£25,583	Lottery
Crossmaglen Rangers GFC	18/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,925	Exchequer
	31/01/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£29,819	Exchequer
	21/06/2013	Sports Matter Community Capital Programme	Upgrade of Training Pitch & Floodlighting	£245,000	Exchequer
	25/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£19,176	Exchequer
Crusaders FC	25/02/2011	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 2 Phase I	£215,280	Exchequer
	25/02/2011	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 2 Phase I	£431,300	Exchequer
	25/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£27,506	Exchequer
	23/02/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,984	Exchequer
Crusaders FC	27/11/2019	Health & Safety	Provision of additional CCTV equipment	£10,253	Exchequer
Derry GAA County Board	21/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment for Celtic Park from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£6,998	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Dollingstown FC	02/03/2011	Sport Matters Capital & Equipment Programme	Floodlighting	£30,000	Exchequer
Donegal Celtic FC	21/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£20,204	Exchequer
	10/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadis Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,750	Exchequer
	14/08/2019	Health & Safety	Safety Management – CCTV	£10,000	Exchequer
	15/11/2019	Health & Safety	Safety at Sports Grounds - Communications	£5,385	Exchequer
Down GAA County Board	30/03/2010	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£658,832	Exchequer
	30/03/2010	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£149,168	Exchequer
	04/02/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£24,500	Exchequer
Dungannon Swifts Football Club	31/05/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£28,500	Exchequer
Dungannon Thomas Clarke GFC	22/10/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£17,483	Exchequer
Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Dungannon United Youth FC	05/03/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£4,950	Exchequer
	29/04/2013	Sports Matter Community Capital Programme	Upgrade natural turf pitch to 3G surface	£245,000	Exchequer
Enniskillen Gaels GAA	21/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,624	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Glenavon FC	04/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£19,062	Exchequer
	18/02/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£5,342	Exchequer
	21/02/2017	Health & Safety	Upgrade of spectator lift for disabled users	£4,899	Exchequer
	06/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£12,600	Exchequer
Glentoran FC	18/03/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£30,000	Exchequer
	25/03/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£15,000	Exchequer
	25/03/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£14,350	Exchequer
	05/03/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£13,437	Exchequer
Institute FC	01/02/2011	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase 1	£686,135	Exchequer
	01/02/2011	Stadia Safety Programme	SSP Year 3 Phase I	£121,865	Exchequer
Irish Football Association	11/03/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£21,745	Exchequer
Larne FC	05/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,875	Exchequer
	05/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£23,325	Exchequer
Larne Football Club NI (Charity)	06/03/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV provision	£15,892	Exchequer
	21/02/2020	Health & Safety	Provision of PA system	£5,398	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Linfield FC	15/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£9,675	Exchequer
Loughgall FC	04/08/2017	Single Facility Fund	Floodlighting	£49,147	Lottery
	04/08/2017	Single Facility Fund	Fees associated with Floodlighting	£9,100	Lottery
	04/08/2017	Single Facility Fund	Floodlighting	£58,246	Exchequer
Moyola Park AFC	05/03/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£3,590	Exchequer
Newry City FC	04/02/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,950	Exchequer
	25/02/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,737	Exchequer
	06/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£19,240	Exchequer
	19/12/2019	Health & Safety	Communications - Designated Venues	£5,249	Exchequer
Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association	05/03/2018	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme 2017	£4,949	Exchequer
Portadown FC	14/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works for Shamrock Park from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£29,979	Exchequer
	14/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment for Shamrock Park from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£18,801	Exchequer
	11/03/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£28,533	Exchequer
	08/02/2019	Health & Safety	CCTV Provision	£18,600	Exchequer
	03/01/2020	Health & Safety	Provision of PA system Equipment	£5,850	Exchequer

Organisation Name	Date Awarded	Programme	Purpose of Grant	Amount Granted	Fund
Shorts FC	15/09/2019	Pitch Maintenance Programme	Pitch Maintenance Programme Phase 2	£29,250	Exchequer
Sport and Leisure Swifts FC	09/03/2010	Soccer Strategy	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities Programme	£87,050	Exchequer
St Enda's (Omagh)	14/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£24,856	Exchequer
	25/02/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£6,460	Exchequer
St John's GAC (Belfast)	14/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,028	Exchequer
St John's GAC (Belfast)	18/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,970	Exchequer
St Molaise GAC (Irvinestown)	14/01/2011	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,515	Exchequer
UB Irish Rugby Football Union	21/12/2010	Stadia Safety Urgent Works	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	£28,828	Exchequer
			Grand Total	£7,565,204	

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities whether she plans to revise licensing legislation to enable local producers of beer, cider and spirits to sell their products directly to the public; and, if so, when the legislation will be brought forward. (AQW 1277/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The reform of licensing laws is an Executive priority under the New Decade, New Approach Deal, and is one that I am keen to move forward as soon as possible.

I am currently considering a draft outcome report on the Department's recent consultation on liquor licensing laws, which includes a number of representations from local producers of beer, cider and spirits. I will announce how I intend to proceed in due course.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities what funding is available for a community hall in Ballymagorry. (AQW 1317/17-22)

Ms Hargey: DfC operates a range of capital programmes that support the development and regeneration of communities which would include funding for community centre/hall facilities that support delivery of programme objectives.

My Department did previously operate a Community Halls Pilot Programme but this is currently closed.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Communities to detail the changes to the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme funding scheme.

(AQW 1396/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer is one of the commitments in the “New Decade, New Approach” Agreement and it provides a real opportunity to contribute to the delivery of wider government priorities and to address a range of social, economic and cultural needs, whilst also meeting the needs of the football family.

Improvements to existing stadia and any new developments must prioritise health and safety provision, be fully accessible, inclusive, sustainable and be based on realistic need.

I am fully committed to delivering on this priority area and to ensuring that the Executive endorsed programme meets the current and future needs of the game.

To this end, I have asked my officials to take forward work to engage with key strategic stakeholders including the IFA, the NI Football League and representatives from District Councils. Once this engagement has been completed, I will then consider proposals to take the Programme forward.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the childcare strategy; and whether her Department intends to introduce a universal free childcare provision for working parents.

(AQW 1413/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration and approval in due course. The Strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation undertaken in 2015, the policy priorities set by the Executive and the extended early education and care services available in other jurisdictions.

The actions required to deliver the dual aims of promoting parental employment and improving child development consulted in 2015, including the scope of and eligibility for extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care provision for families with children aged 3 to 4, requires Executive approval.

I am not in a position to outline the scope of any proposed childcare offer in advance of the Executive’s consideration of the budget and resources available to deliver all the actions.

Department of Education

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been provided to the Irish language sector, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 316/17-22)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The total amount of funding, both resource and capital, which has been provided to the Irish language sector by my Department in each of the last five years is as follows:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Resource	£20,460,021	£21,769,542	£22,947,139	£23,756,630	£24,418,522
Capital	£6,500,000	£9,100,000	£9,400,000	£3,800,000	£2,200,000
Total	£26,960,021	£30,869,542	£32,347,139	£27,556,630	£26,618,522

Note: The figures for 2019-20 include allocations to date and therefore are subject to change.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education what impact receiving only £19.1m of the £38.4m monitoring round bid will have on (i) teacher’s pay; and (ii) non-teaching staff pay.

(AQW 1102/17-22)

Mr Weir: The £19m allocation will go some way towards addressing the existing in-year teaching and non-teaching pay pressures within the education sector, however significant in-year pay pressures will remain.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the numbers of children waiting to be statemented, by constituency.

(AQW 1266/17-22)

Mr Weir: This has been interpreted as the number of referrals to the Education Authority for a statutory assessment (a statutory assessment may result in a statement or a note in lieu of a statement).

Constituency	No of Pupils
Belfast East	110
Belfast North	172
Belfast South	144
Belfast West	208
East Antrim	69
East Londonderry	69
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	72
Foyle	147
Lagan Valley	126
Mid Ulster	89
Newry and Armagh	151
North Antrim	76
North Down	109
South Antrim	83
South Down	160
Strangford	120
Upper Bann	148
West Tyrone	55

The data above is the number of children, by constituency, who are currently undergoing a statutory assessment.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to outline the estimated process for the allocation of a Special Educational Needs assessment at present and how many assessments are pending decision.

(AQW 1289/17-22)

Mr Weir: 'Special Educational Needs assessment' is taken to refer to the statutory assessment process undertaken by the Education Authority (EA) to decide whether or not a child requires a statement of special educational needs (SEN).

A child will be brought to the EA's attention as possibly requiring a statutory assessment by a referral from a mainstream school or another agency or by a formal request from a parent. The EA will then consider whether to issue a notice to parents that it proposes to make an assessment.

The maximum length of time for completion of the statutory assessment process is 26 weeks. However, there are valid exceptions outlined in the legislation which can be applied and which may result in the process being completed beyond the 26 week timeframe.

There are 2,108 children currently undergoing a statutory assessment in the EA.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail any proposed capital investment at Lisanally Special School, Armagh.
(AQW 1298/17-22)

Mr Weir: Lisanally Special School was included in the second tranche of projects announced in January 2019 to advance in design under the School Enhancement Programme Second Call (SEP2).

As Lisanally Special School is a controlled school, the SEP2 project is being taken forward by the Education Authority (EA). The EA is in the process of appointing an Integrated Consultancy Team to take forward the detailed design of the scheme and work in relation to surveys is expected to commence shortly. Feasibility options will be developed from these initial surveys.

It is not possible to be definitive about the likely spend on this individual project until the technical feasibility work is complete however SEP projects typically result in investment of between £2.5m and £4m.

In addition the EA is currently advancing four projects through its Minor Works Programme to address urgent and unavoidable issues at the school.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education, further to the consultation on proposed updates to Nutritional Standards for School Food, has his Department considered the replacement of nitrate meat with nitrate-free meat.

(AQW 1322/17-22)

Mr Weir: The proposed nutritional standards are based on the recommendations of the Eatwell Guide. The Eatwell Guide is a policy tool, produced by Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and Food Standards Agency (FSA) in NI, used to define government recommendations on eating healthily and achieving a balanced diet. The Eatwell Guide does not make any recommendation with regards to the replacement of nitrate meat with nitrate-free meat.

The FSA in NI is the authority on food safety here and assisted my Department in drafting the proposed update to the Nutritional Standards for School Food which is currently out to public consultation. The consultation is open for comments until 27 March 2020.

Further details on nitrates in meat should be sought directly from the FSA.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 14/16-21, AQW 5338/16-21 and AQW 5333/16-21, whether he is committed to ending the teacher exemption from fair employment regulations as currently enshrined in Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

(AQW 1386/17-22)

Mr Weir: As I have previously stated, I am committed to delivering equality for all school sectors, and this includes consideration of an end to the Article 71 Exception of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO). However, FETO is the legislative responsibility of The Executive Office and therefore any amendments to the legislation would be a matter for them to address.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2706/11-16, AQW 42101/11-16, AQW 43428/11-16, AQW 53281/11-16, and AQW 5338/16-21, what reviews, reports and policy development has occurred since 2010, in the area of teacher recruitment and promotion in the context of Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

(AQW 1387/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education is not the employer of teachers and policy responsibility for their recruitment and promotion lies with the relevant employing authorities – the Education Authority in respect of controlled schools; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in respect of maintained schools; and individual Boards of Governors in the case of Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools.

In 2013, the Department undertook a Review of Teaching Employment Opportunities to investigate concerns that the requirement to possess a Certificate in Religious Education could lead to inequality in employment opportunities for teachers. A report of the findings of that Review is available on the DE Website (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Review-of-employment-opportunities-for-teaching-staff-Part-1.pdf>)

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education whether he intends, given its cross-cutting nature, to bring the issue of removing the teacher exemption from fair employment regulations as currently enshrined in Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 to the Executive.

(AQW 1388/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 (FETO) is the legislative responsibility of The Executive Office and therefore any amendments to the legislation would be a matter for them to address.

I am committed to delivering equality for all school sectors; this includes consideration of an end to the Article 71 Exception of FETO.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to address congestion and road safety issues with the Minister for Infrastructure around Castlerock Road, Coleraine, considering the expected increase in the schools' population following the full implementation of the area plan.

(AQW 1397/17-22)

Mr Weir: I am aware of the implications for traffic management around Castlerock Road, Coleraine following the implementation of the area plan. While I have had no direct discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure on traffic issues in the area, my officials and the Department's technical advisers have been working with various stakeholders and the planning authorities to seek to mitigate additional congestion and road safety issues around Loreto College and Coleraine Grammar School.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education whether all money set aside for school new builds; (i) has been spent in the past five years; and (ii) will be spent in this mandate.

(AQW 1399/17-22)

Mr Weir: No capital budget is 'set aside' for 'school new builds'. The capital budget is managed across the range of capital programmes for which the Department is responsible, with firm allocations made to projects when contractual commitments have been entered into.

I can confirm that over 99% of the total capital budget available to the Department has been spent in each of the last five years and this remains my target for the remainder of this mandate.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's capital spend budget for new schools.
(AQW 1401/17-22)

Mr Weir: The overall capital budget available to me in 2019/20 is £157.6million, which covers a number of key areas including Major Works, School Enhancement Programme, Minor Works, Youth Capital and Other Capital.

I have indicatively allocated £38.6m of this budget for major capital works in 2019/20.

I do not have visibility of the capital budget for future years at this time.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education for an update in relation to his Department's decision on the future of Groarty Integrated Primary School, Derry.
(AQW 1412/17-22)

Mr Weir: Development Proposal 586 for the proposed closure of Groarty Controlled Integrated Primary School is under consideration by my officials and I expect to make a decision in the coming weeks.

A copy of the final decision will be published on the Department's website at:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/development-proposal-decisions-2020>

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to outline what target his Department has for the number of children in integrated schools by the year 2030.
(AQW 1419/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department does not set targets for the number of children in any schools. Parental preference is the determining factor in relation to demand for school places in all sectors, and my Department will continue to work to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education in line with its statutory duty.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the viability of extending the Education Support Fund to include adopted children.
(AQW 1421/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education and Department of Health are currently in the final stages of developing a joint Looked after Children Strategy entitled, 'A Life Deserved: 'Caring' for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland'.

One of the proposed commitments to action under the Learning and Achieve outcome, is to review the effectiveness of looked after children-targeted funding, currently provided through the Common Funding Formula and, if effective, consider extending it to other groups.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to make healthy eating a key element in the school curriculum.
(AQW 1442/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department recognises the importance of young people being educated to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (primary level) and the Learning for Life and Work (post-primary level) areas of learning are statutory elements within the Northern Ireland curriculum. These areas of learning provide an opportunity for pupils, from Foundation Stage (ages 4 to 6) to Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14), to learn effectively how to keep themselves healthy and safe, aligned to the importance of healthy eating.

To support schools in the delivery of the curriculum, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment develops and produces curricular guidance and teaching support materials for use in schools. This includes resources to address the broader issues of obesity, over-consumption of junk food and general health.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Education to provide detail on the delay in the recruitment of a School Patrol Officer at Christ the King Primary School, Omagh.
(AQW 1447/17-22)

Mr Weir: Christ the King Primary School informed the Education Authority Transport Service of the School Crossing Control vacancy in December 2019. Following an assessment of the road to ensure that it met the requirements for a replacement School Crossing Patrol, a requisition was raised and approved by Transport Services in mid-January and subsequently advertised on 28 January 2020 with a closing date of 20 February 2020.

Arrangements are being put in place to commence the selection process as soon as applications close with a view to filling this post as soon as possible. In the interim period, the Transport Service is working with the school to source a temporary replacement.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to increase the pupil intake at Rathfriland High School. (AQW 1469/17-22)

Mr Weir: To give effect to a permanent increase in Rathfriland High School's admissions and enrolment numbers would require the publication of a Development Proposal. No proposal has been brought forward, as yet, in relation to this school.

The Department has the power to grant Temporary Variations (TVs) to facilitate short-term increases to a school's approved numbers. TVs are used to address demographic pressures in an area and not to facilitate parental preferences for a particular school.

If Rathfriland High School is oversubscribed at Year 8 in any given year it may apply for a TV and my Department will consider whether an increase is required.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans for additional autism support units for mainstream schools in Strabane. (AQW 1486/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for the provision of autism support units. Any significant changes to a school such as the addition of autism support units requires the publication of a Development Proposal which is a statutory process.

The EA's current proposals for change are listed in its Action Plan 2019-21. There is no action in the current plan in relation to Strabane schools.

The EA recognises that there is a deficit of specialist mainstream provisions in a number of areas across the region. The need for additional specialist mainstream provision in the North West area including Strabane is recognised and will be considered as part of the next tranche of priorities.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail all mainstream schools with autism support units in West Tyrone. (AQW 1487/17-22)

Mr Weir: There is one mainstream school which has pupils registered in an Autism Specific Learning Support Class in West Tyrone:

- Omagh County Primary School

Source: Census 2018/19

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail the measures he is taking to ensure efficient communication between the Education Authority and school principals in relation to budgets. (AQW 1488/17-22)

Mr Weir: While it is the Education Authority's responsibility, as the funding authority for all grant-aided schools, to ensure that it communicates efficiently with school principals and boards of governors in relation to budgets as part of the financial planning process, my officials seek and receive regular updates in relation to this.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to outline what training his Department issues to schools to help teaching staff and classroom assistants deal with and/or support students with (i) food allergies; and (ii) the use of EpiPens. (AQW 1490/17-22)

Mr Weir: "Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs" guidance (2008) was jointly produced by my Department and the Department of Health (DoH), to assist schools to develop policies on managing medication in schools, including the administration of medicine and providing effective support to individual pupils with medication needs, including those with anaphylaxis. Supporting guidance on the use of adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) was issued in October 2018 and includes information to reduce the risk of allergen exposure in children with food allergy.

In February 2019, the EA issued interim regional guidance for the provision of Special Diets in schools to support schools and school meals services in catering for special dietary requirements including allergies.

The Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) School Nursing Service writes to all schools annually to offer training on anaphylaxis and medical emergencies. This includes the use of EpiPens. Training for teachers and school staff in line with the pupil's individual healthcare plan is subject to on-going review. There is also scope for additional in year training to be offered on a needs basis.

HSCT School Nurses are aligned to schools to work in partnership with parents and school staff to develop a health/medication plan for each child with medical needs, including severe allergy.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of his Department's Music Service in the (i) North Eastern region; and (ii) Western region.

(AQW 1510/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has operational responsibility for the Music Service. The EA advises it does not track its income and expenditure on an area basis. The total cost of the Music Service in 2018/19 was just over £4.3million.

I am advised that, in addition to whole class instrumental programmes, there are approximately 3201 pupils receiving instrumental tuition in the former North Eastern Region and 3082 pupils in the former Western Region.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Education how many pupils currently receive instrumental tuition outside of Whole Class Instrumental Programmes in the (i) North Eastern region; and (ii) Western region.

(AQW 1511/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has operational responsibility for the Music Service. The EA advises it does not track its income and expenditure on an area basis. The total cost of the Music Service in 2018/19 was just over £4.3million.

I am advised that, in addition to whole class instrumental programmes, there are approximately 3201 pupils receiving instrumental tuition in the former North Eastern Region and 3082 pupils in the former Western Region.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what short-term and long-term actions his Department is planning in response to the recommendations from the Rose Review.

(AQW 1581/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department did not commission the Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship and the report did not make any recommendations that fall directly within my responsibility. However, my Department continues to contribute towards a number of Executive strategies that underpin economic growth here.

Growing a dynamic and innovative economy relies heavily on the expertise of the workforce and schools are playing a key role in developing the requisite skills. At Key Stage 3, for example, Learning for Life and Work provides opportunities for young people to explore enterprise and entrepreneurship and to develop and practise the skills associated with being innovative.

I recognise the need for effective links between schools and business. These are important to enable young people to understand and develop the key skills required for life and work. I continue to support a number of organisations, such as Young Enterprise Northern Ireland and Business in the Community, which provide opportunities for young people, regardless of gender, to develop and explore their entrepreneurial potential and build employability skills.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Education whether (i) the Land and Property Services valuation for land at 10 Coshquin Road, Derry, has been ascertained; and (ii) what actions have been taken to acquire the land in order to allow Gaelscoil na Daróige to expand; and (iii) at what stage are the negotiations.

(AQW 1610/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department has instructed Land & Property Services to provide valuations for the additional access that Gaelscoil na Daróige is seeking.

Discussions with the relevant land owners will commence once my Department has received all of the relevant valuations.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Education whether he can confirm if Gaelscoil Na Daróige, Derry, will have an additional classroom on the current site for September 2020, as proposed in the Area Planning Recommendations for Irish-Medium Primary Provision in Derry City.

(AQW 1612/17-22)

Mr Weir: Gaelscoil na Daróige has four classrooms. The school's current enrolment of 87 pupils is on the borderline between a 3 and 4 class school. Therefore, given that the school currently has access to four classrooms, it would not be eligible for an additional classroom.

That said, the school operates on a particularly constrained site and some of their existing classrooms are undersized. Taking this into account together with the predicted rise in numbers of pupils entering Rang 1 over the next few years, I have asked my Department to instruct the Education Authority to carry out a feasibility study to ascertain if additional accommodation would be required. Regardless of the outcome however additional accommodation will not be in place for September 2020.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to outline what guidance the Education Authority has issued, or what policies are in place, to ensure personal information relating to staff and pupils are not listed in the minutes of Boards of Governors meetings, which are published by the Education Authority.

(AQW 1636/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education wrote to all schools and the Education Authority in April 2018 to make them aware of the requirements of the incoming General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the impact this would have on schools

and how they manage personal data. As data controllers, school Boards of Governors are accountable for ensuring that data protection practice within the school meets the requirements of the legislation, including any requirements on the management of personal data.

The EA has a dedicated on-line “Think Data” resource hub which provides school staff and governors with data protection related guidance and support as well as on-line data protection training.

The Education Authority’s Scheme for the Management of Controlled Schools sets out the requirements in relation to the minutes of meetings of boards of governors, specifically paragraphs 58 – 61.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the Board of Governors of Bleary Primary School, Co. Armagh; and (ii) in what capacity the different governors are appointed.

(AQW 1637/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Board of Governors of Bleary Primary School, Co. Armagh, consists of nine voting members as follows: four transferor representatives; two parent representatives; two members appointed by the Education Authority; and one teacher representative. The Principal is entitled to attend and take part in meetings of the Board of Governors but not to vote. The school currently has its full complement of governors.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the current status of the Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme; and (ii) whether there are any plans for a further phase of the scheme during the current mandate.

(AQW 1674/17-22)

Mr Weir: The 2018/19 Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme, which was funded from the Public Sector Transformation Fund, expired on 31 March 2019. While there are currently no plans to run the Scheme again, I am keen to explore the introduction of a further phase or a scheme of a similar nature during the current mandate.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on the application of St Patrick’s Primary School, Newry, to the School Enhancement programme.

(AQW 1697/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department received 165 applications to the second call of the School Enhancement Programme (SEP2). Under the published SEP2 protocol (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enhancement-programme-second-call-protocol-selection>), all applications were subject to Gateway checks. Those schools not filtered out as part of the Gateway process were scored and separate prioritised lists of projects produced for primary schools, post-primary schools and special schools.

To date, 33 primary schools have been announced to advance in design from the SEP2 prioritised primary school list and I can confirm that St Patrick’s Primary School, The Meadow, Newry remains on the primary school prioritised list.

The prioritised lists from this call will remain live to May 2020 and there is therefore the potential for a further, final announcement before the lists expire.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1143/17-22, to outline how many children within the Lagan Valley constituency appear on the special educational needs register.

(AQW 1711/17-22)

Mr Weir: According to the most recent figures available there were 3,911 pupils residing in the Lagan Valley constituency recorded by schools on the special educational needs register.

The information is collected from the annual school census and refers to the 2018/19 academic year. Information for the 2019/20 academic year will be published on the 27th February.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister of Education to outline what plans his Department has to create additional nurture units in the Mid Ulster constituency.

(AQW 1717/17-22)

Mr Weir: I would refer the member to my previous response to AQW 737/17-22, tabled by Trevor Clarke MLA, published on 27 January 2020.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education when the application for improved car parking and staff parking at Kilkeel Primary School will be approved.

(AQW 1722/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that a business case for traffic management and car parking improvements at Kilkeel Primary School will be prepared early in 2020/21 and should form part of the Education Authority’s programme for delivery in 2020/21.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education how many children in Upper Bann avail of free school meals, broken down by; (i) primary education; and (ii) secondary education.

(AQW 1734/17-22)

Mr Weir: According to the most recent figures available there were (i) 3,186 pupils in primary education and (ii) 2,396 pupils in secondary education residing in the Upper Bann constituency recorded by schools as being entitled to free school meals.

The information is collected from the annual school census and refers to the 2018/19 academic year. Information for the 2019/20 academic year will be published on the 27th February.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education how many schools in Upper Bann are in a budget deficit, broken down by; (i) primary school; and (ii) post-primary school.

(AQW 1735/17-22)

Mr Weir: The number of schools in Upper Bann, in a budget deficit at 1 April 2019, broken down by: (i) primary school; and (ii) post-primary school, are noted in the table below.

School Phase	Number of schools in budget deficit in Upper Bann as at 1 April 2019
Primary	23
Post-primary	7

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children waiting for a statement of special educational needs in East Belfast.

(AQW 1770/17-22)

Mr Weir: I would refer the member to my previous response to AQW1266/17-22, tabled by Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, published in the Official Report on 10 February 2020.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to introduce coding and digital skills to the primary curriculum to ensure children and young people are prepared for the jobs of the future.

(AQO 65/17-22)

Mr Weir: The statutory curriculum is designed to give schools as much flexibility as possible in what they choose to teach and to use approaches that best suit their pupils. The curriculum is designed to be adaptable and dynamic.

This is particularly valuable in rapidly changing and advancing areas such as digital skills and coding, as it enables schools to keep pace with developments in digital technology both locally and internationally.

There are many opportunities, at primary level, for schools to help young people understand the application of digital technology in life and learning, and to integrate the ever expanding area of coding into their teaching.

My Department continues to support the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in developing a range of resources and providing support to teachers, which will help primary-age children understand the application of digital technology in life and learning. This includes workshops for teachers on Coding with Scratch activities, including computational thinking and designing and creating a digital product.

CCEA has also developed a Digital Skills Curriculum and Qualifications Framework, which maps how digital skills for learners should be woven into the curriculum from Foundation Stage, through the primary key stages, to post-primary and beyond.

My Department also currently funds Business in the Community's Time to Code Programme for Key Stage 2 pupils, as well as supporting the "IT's Your Choice Programme" developed by Sentinus, which delivers coding activities and will engage almost 11,000 primary and post-primary pupils during 2019/20.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW2494/08, to detail the primary school capital build programmes approved in the East Antrim constituency, in each of the last ten financial years.

(AQW 1804/17-22)

Mr Weir: There have been four primary school capital build programmes approved in the East Antrim constituency in the last ten financial years.

Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus, was announced to proceed in design in June 2014 for a new 7 class controlled primary school. A Business Case was approved by DE on 28 April 2015. The school was handed over in November 2019 and all works will be complete by March 2020.

Corran Integrated Primary School was announced to proceed in design in January 2013 for a new seven class base school and new nursery unit. A Business Case was approved by DE on 6 May 2015. The scheme was completed in June 2019.

Islandmagee Primary School, an amalgamation of Kilcoan and Mullaghduh, was announced to proceed in design in March 2016 for a new 5 class controlled primary school. A Business Case was approved by DE on 26 July 2019.

Acorn Integrated Primary School was announced to proceed to design in March 2013 under the School Enhancement Programme. A Business Case was approved by DE in February 2014. A 3 classroom extension replaced the temporary accommodation with a permanent building structure, providing a better layout and operational working environment for the school and meeting the schools entitlement under the handbook. Additional hard play area for the children was also provided under the SEP.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education to detail which of the 10 primary school new build projects, announced as part of a £40m capital investment, have progressed to (i) business case approval; (ii) full planning approval; and (iii) commencement of building work on site.

(AQW 1805/17-22)

Mr Weir: On 15 March 2016 10 Primary Schools were announced to advance to planning at a total capital value of circa £40m.

To date 5 projects have received Business Case approval and are at early planning stage. Business Cases for the remaining 5 projects are being prepared at present. Full planning approval is not in place on any.

Due to the complexity of capital projects there are a number of factors that dictate their delivery; however, it is anticipated that the majority will be on site in 2022.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on the commencement and implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

(AQW 1819/17-22)

Mr Weir: I would refer the member to my previous response to AQW 437/17-22, tabled by Karen Mullan MLA, published on 23 January 2020.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for an update on a proposed new build for St Columbanus' College, Bangor.

(AQO 63/17-22)

Mr Weir: St Columbanus' College, Bangor, was included in the second tranche of projects announced in January 2019 to advance in planning under the Second Call to the School Enhancement Programme (SEP2). Departmental officials are currently working with the school to agree the scope of the proposed project, which is likely to involve the development of a new standalone teaching block on the site.

Under the SEP2 protocol, schools which secure investment under SEP2 will not be considered for a wholly new build project for seven years.

I anticipate that the facilities provided under both SEP and the Department's minor works programme will have a positive impact on the community at St Columbanus' College.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to undertake a review of Home to School Transport to meet the needs of families in rural areas.

(AQO 64/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department is currently undertaking a review of the home to school transport policy as part of the wider Education Transformation Programme. The aim of this review is to ensure the policy is fit for purpose and sustainable over the long term. The review will look at home to school transport in rural and urban areas.

A detailed programme of initial stakeholder engagement was completed in early 2019 that offered opportunities for all those with an interest in the area to put forward their views. A number of these events took place in rural areas and sought to gather the views of those living in these areas.

Each day, the Education Authority transports approximately 84,000 pupils to and from school and it is a service that is highly valued by parents and pupils. Over 70% of these pupils live in a rural area.

While there will always be some exceptions, in the main, the vast majority of pupils in rural areas are receiving a service that gets them to and from their school in a safe, comfortable and timely manner.

I understand that any changes to this policy as a result of the review will have an impact on many families living across Northern Ireland. It is essential, therefore, that this review is robust and evidence-based. We also need to ensure we understand the impact any changes may have on families as well as on wider society in areas such as air pollution and traffic congestion.

The review will be exploring all aspects of the current policy to see if change is necessary in the years ahead.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Education how much of the total funding allocated to shared and integrated education since 2016 has been spent by his Department.

(AQO 66/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) set out a commitment by the UK Government (UKG) to release up to £500m over ten years (£50m per year) of new capital funding to support shared and integrated education and housing, subject to individual projects being agreed between the Executive and the UKG.

Between the Fresh Start announcement on 23 March 2016 and the end of December 2019 my Department has spent £28.5m of Fresh Start funding.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Cullybackey College.
(AQO 67/17-22)

Mr Weir: A technical Feasibility Study for Cullybackey College was submitted by the Education Authority in December 2019 and is currently being examined by the Department's professional advisors.

Once approved, the Feasibility Study will be used to finalise the Business Case for this project.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to allocate additional funding to support mental health in schools.
(AQO 68/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department is working collaboratively with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency, the Health and Social Care Board and the Education Authority, to develop an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework that will aim to enhance support for children and young people. The emphasis will be on promotion, prevention and early intervention, including how services can be augmented to support schools, and their pupils.

Budgets beyond this current financial year are not yet known, therefore no decisions have been taken in relation to future years as yet.

Mr O'Toole asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of why Northern Ireland has the lowest skills attainment in the United Kingdom and Ireland
(AQO 69/17-22)

Mr Weir: I understand that the trends outlined in the question are taken from Eurostat's Labour Force Survey and relate specifically to 30-34 year olds in the working age population.

In contrast to the pattern outlined in the question, pupils at school in Northern Ireland are performing well when compared to those in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Our GCSE and A level outcomes are not only impressive but continue to improve year on year. As reported in the latest school leavers' statistics, 95% of our pupils leave school with passes in at least 5 GCSEs or equivalent (A*-E) and the vast majority, 96%, progress into further or higher education, employment or training.

Added to that is our performance in international studies, this includes OECD's PISA, which assesses our 15 year olds, and PIRLS and TIMSS which survey our P6 pupils.

The outcomes achieved in these studies point to our children and young people more than holding their own, both in comparison with our nearest neighbours and on an international basis.

The young people who recently participated in PISA are the first cohort to take part whose entire school career has been delivered through the Northern Ireland curriculum, which was introduced in 2007. I believe their achievements demonstrate the success of our broad and balanced skills based curriculum.

As part of a whole of government approach, I would suggest that my department is making a significant contribution to enhancing the skills profile of our workforce.

Department of Finance

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance to provide an overview of the role of the Central Procurement Unit; and how he will ensure that social clauses will be central to each Departments' awarding of contracts for construction, goods and services.
(AQW 1193/17-22)

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): Construction and Procurement Delivery supports the Procurement Board, which I chair, in the development of public procurement policy.

Ensuring social value is at the heart of procurement is a priority for me and I will shortly announce my plans in this regard.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Finance how he intends to support new and emerging businesses following the recent Review of the Non-Domestic Rating System.
(AQW 1232/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department currently legislates for over £235 million in business rate support. The options for all relief provision for 2020/21 and beyond will need to be considered in the context of the Business Rates Review, the wider budgetary issues that face us as an Executive and the decisions around the 2020/21 Regional Rate. In relation to the specific issue of new and emerging businesses, support was expressed within the Review for schemes such as the "Back in Business" rate relief to be reinstated. This is something I will look at.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Finance what action was taken by Land and Property Services to recover unpaid rates between the 2015/16 and 2018/19 financial years.

(AQW 1327/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Debt arises because ratepayers have not paid their rate bills. I recognise that we are in a challenging economic environment and many people are struggling to pay their bills.

Land & Property Services will work with ratepayers facing financial difficulty to try and set up mutually agreeable payment arrangements. In 2018/19 alone, Land & Property Services set up almost 55,000 payment arrangements with ratepayers.

However, where ratepayers fail to make an arrangement to pay, or subsequently default on an arrangement to pay, LPS will pursue that debt through legal action. Legal action begins after Land & Property Services issues a final rate demand. Land & Property Services will then begin to issue Court processes, proceeding to the award of Decrees in Debt by the Courts if the debt remains unpaid. At this point if non-payment continues, Land & Property Services can proceed to bankruptcy action if the debt is more than £5,000. For debts less than this, LPS can lodge the debt with the Enforcement of Judgements Office (EJO). This work has been ongoing over the past three years. Figures for 2018/19 show that LPS took the following legal recovery actions:

Type of Action	2018/19
Final Demand	95,065
Court Processes	24,105
Decrees	12,853
Notice of Intention (debt lodged with EJO)	1,488
Active Cases Enforced with EJO	4,994
Bankruptcy/liquidation *	450

* Number of occupancies where LPS made the ratepayer bankrupt. Ratepayers may have more than one occupancy, so actual number of ratepayers will be less than 450

In addition to legal enforcement through the Courts, LPS undertakes other activities to recover unpaid rates. This includes:

Targeted telephone contact with accounts in arrears.

Text message reminders for ratepayers who have defaulted on repayment arrangements.

Targeted use of external debt collection services to pursue difficult debt such as outside jurisdiction debtors. To date 428 cases have been referred and £395,000 has been collected or secured via payment arrangements.

Advising ratepayers on reliefs, benefits and exclusions to which they may be entitled, to help meet their rate liability.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Finance what revenue raising measures he intends to pursue over the next two financial years.

(AQW 1328/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In the course of agreeing a Budget for 2020-21 the Executive will consider the options available to address budgetary pressures. This may include individual Ministers considering potential revenue raising options which fall within their policy area.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of Civil Service staff who are currently temporary promoted or designated to higher grades, broken down by (i) Department; (ii) grade; and (iii) constituency.

(AQW 1414/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The table in Annex 1 provides details of the number of Civil Service staff who were temporarily promoted at 2 January 2020, broken down by Department, analogous grade and constituency area, based on primary work location.

The table in Annex 2 provides details on the number of staff who were designated to a higher grade on 2 January 2020 and have made a claim for deputising allowance, broken down by Department, analogous grade and constituency area, based on primary work location.

Annex 1

Number of staff on Temporary Promotion at 2 January 2020

Department	Assembly Area (Work Location)	Temporary Promotion Grade Level									Total
		Senior Civil Servant	Grade 6	Grade 7	Deputy Principal	Staff Officer	Executive Officer 1	Executive Officer 2	Admin- istrative Officer	Prison Grades	
DAERA	Belfast East	4	1	12	19	13	7	11	4		71
	Belfast South	0	1	3	16	10	1	2	2		35
	East Londonderry	1	1	6	15	10	5	3	1		42
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	0	0	2	3	3	4	1		13
	Foyle	0	1	2	2	5	4	18	2		34
	Lagan Valley	0	0	1	3	8	0	1	0		13
	Mid Ulster	0	0	2	2	2	0	2	2		10
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	4	1	2	4	3		14
	North Antrim	0	1	3	1	2	1	0	1		9
	South Antrim	0	1	0	5	1	3	3	5		18
	South Down	1	0	3	1	0	1	1	2		9
	Strangford	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3		5
	West Tyrone	0	0	2	2	0	1	2	2		9
	Total	6	6	34	72	55	28	53	28		282
DE	Belfast East	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0		4
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	1	5	4	3		13
	North Down	1	1	1	13	7	5	4	1		33
	Total	1	1	1	15	9	10	9	4		50
DfC	Belfast East	1	0	0	0	6	2	4	1		14
	Belfast North	0	0	1	5	9	12	18	1		46
	Belfast South	7	6	17	46	47	49	76	6		254
	Belfast West	0	0	1	6	11	28	40	1		87
	East Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0		6
	East Londonderry	0	0	1	1	1	4	13	1		21
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	7	17	0		24
	Foyle	0	0	1	3	6	10	20	4		44
	Lagan Valley	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	0		8
	Mid Ulster	0	0	0	0	1	1	12	0		14
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	1	0	2	1	15	2		21
	North Antrim	0	0	2	0	0	0	5	2		9
	North Down	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0		3
	South Antrim	0	0	1	0	1	2	9	0		13
	South Down	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0		1
	Strangford	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0		3
Upper Bann	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0		3	

Department	Assembly Area (Work Location)	Temporary Promotion Grade Level									Total
		Senior Civil Servant	Grade 6	Grade 7	Deputy Principal	Staff Officer	Executive Officer 1	Executive Officer 2	Admin- istrative Officer	Prison Grades	
	West Tyrone	0	0	0	0	1	4	5	0		10
	Total	8	6	25	62	85	123	254	18		581
DfE	Belfast East	2	0	10	7	4	4	3	0		30
	Belfast South	3	4	13	21	18	6	9	0		74
	Total	5	4	23	28	22	10	12	0		104
DfI	Belfast East	0	0	1	1	3	0	1	1		7
	Belfast North	0	1	1	2	2	3	0	0		9
	Belfast South	0	0	6	19	8	5	5	0		43
	East Londonderry	0	0	2	1	4	5	7	15		34
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0		2
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0		3
	Lagan Valley	0	0	2	2	5	1	3	0		13
	Mid Ulster	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0		5
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0		1
	North Antrim	0	0	0	2	4	4	2	0		12
	South Antrim	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0		3
	South Down	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	1		7
	Upper Bann	0	0	2	2	2	2	4	2		14
	West Tyrone	0	1	1	1	3	1	4	0		11
	Total	0	3	17	30	41	25	29	19		164
DoF	Belfast East	5	3	19	13	16	11	11	0		78
	Belfast South	8	15	29	33	33	27	33	0		178
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	7	4	4	0		15
	Lagan Valley	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0		2
	Upper Bann	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0		1
	West Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1		3
	Total	13	18	48	48	57	43	49	1		277
DoH	Belfast East	5	3	20	23	17	7	10	1		86
	Total	5	3	20	23	17	7	10	1		86
DoJ	Belfast East	3	7	7	15	4	6	12	0	3	57
	Belfast South	2	6	8	13	16	33	18	0	26	122
	East Antrim	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	5
	East Londonderry	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	19	21
	Lagan Valley	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	18	22
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	North Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	South Antrim	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Department	Assembly Area (Work Location)	Temporary Promotion Grade Level									Total
		Senior Civil Servant	Grade 6	Grade 7	Deputy Principal	Staff Officer	Executive Officer 1	Executive Officer 2	Admin- istrative Officer	Prison Grades	
	South Down	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	Strangford	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Upper Bann	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	5	14	15	33	25	47	30	0	66	235
PPS	Belfast South	0	5	4	3	2	3	6	8		31
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2		2
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0		1
	Total	0	5	4	3	2	4	6	10		34
TEO	Belfast East	3	0	4	6	3	4	3	0		23
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		1
	Outside Northern Ireland	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		2
	Total	3	0	4	6	3	4	3	1		26
Overall	Belfast East	23	14	73	86	67	41	56	7	3	370
	Belfast North	0	1	2	7	11	15	18	1		55
	Belfast South	20	37	80	151	134	124	149	16	26	737
	Belfast West	0	0	1	6	11	28	40	1		87
	East Antrim	0	1	0	0	2	2	6	0		11
	East Londonderry	1	1	9	18	15	15	23	17	19	118
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	0	0	2	3	11	22	1		39
	Foyle	0	1	3	5	22	23	46	11		111
	Lagan Valley	0	0	3	9	15	2	11	0	18	58
	Mid Ulster	0	1	4	2	5	1	14	2		29
	Newry & Armagh	0	0	1	4	3	6	19	6		39
	North Antrim	0	1	5	3	7	6	7	3		32
	North Down	1	1	1	13	7	5	7	1		36
	South Antrim	0	1	1	6	4	6	12	5		35
	South Down	1	0	3	1	4	4	3	3		19
	Strangford	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	3		9
	Upper Bann	0	0	2	4	2	4	5	2		19
	West Tyrone	0	1	3	3	4	7	12	3		33
	Outside Northern Ireland	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		2
	Total	48	60	191	320	316	301	455	82	66	1839

Annex 2

Number of staff designated to a higher grade on 2 January 2020 and have made a claim for deputising allowance

Department	Assembly Area (Work Location)	Substantive Grade Level							Total
		Deputy Principal	Staff Officer	Executive Officer 1	Executive Officer 2	Administrative Officer	Administrative Assistant	Industrial	
DfC	Belfast East	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Belfast North	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
	Belfast South	1	0	4	8	6	1	0	20
	Belfast West	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
	East Antrim	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
	South Down	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	Strangford	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
	Upper Bann	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	4
	West Tyrone	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	2	4	8	17	11	1	0	43
DfI	Belfast North	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Belfast South	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	East Londonderry	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Lagan Valley	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
	North Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	South Antrim	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
	Strangford	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Upper Bann	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	West Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	Total	0	0	2	0	9	0	6	17
Overall	Belfast East	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Belfast North	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	5
	Belfast South	1	0	4	8	7	1	0	21
	Belfast West	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
	East Antrim	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	East Londonderry	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Foyle	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
	Lagan Valley	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
	North Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	South Antrim	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
	South Down	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	Strangford	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	4

Department	Assembly Area (Work Location)	Substantive Grade Level							Total
		Deputy Principal	Staff Officer	Executive Officer 1	Executive Officer 2	Administrative Officer	Administrative Assistant	Industrial	
	Upper Bann	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	5
	West Tyrone	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
	Total	2	4	10	17	20	1	6	60

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance, in light of the commitment given in New Decade, New Approach, to detail his plan to address the costs associated with delivering public services in a divided society.

(AQW 1452/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The New Decade, New Approach document acknowledges the significant challenge that arises in seeking to tackle the financial burden associated with delivering public services in a divided society.

As set out in the document, I would expect that, in developing new policies and, over time, in reviewing existing ones, the Executive will take steps to eliminate all such costs. In the first instance it will be for individual Ministers to ensure that the services they provide are appropriate and cost effective.

The enhanced strategic focus, highlighted in the document, within the Programme for Government on ending sectarianism will ultimately reduce the costs of division.

My officials are currently costing the delivery of the priorities identified in the New Decade, New Approach document. When this work is completed there will be further discussion with the Treasury around an appropriate financial package.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the cost of legal fees incurred by his Department as a result of the Renewable Heat Incentive Inquiry broken down by (i) representation and legal services for politicians; (ii) representation and legal services for civil servants; and (iii) others and the Department generally.

(AQW 1497/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department incurred no legal costs in respect of politicians or individual civil servants. The legal costs incurred by my Department as a core participant in the RHI Inquiry are £372k.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Finance whether he has any plans to change Building Control regulations on energy use in new buildings by introducing the equivalent of Part L, which applies to Great Britain.

(AQW 1643/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department's Building Standards Team has developed a work programme of proposed amendments to Building Regulations, which it plans to bring to its statutory Advisory Committee and then to public consultation.

In relation to Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations, these will take into consideration developments in other regions, including England's Part L proposals for 2020, as well as addressing any uplifts necessary to address the gap in performance standards with the current Part L.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the (i) revenue raising initiatives across Executive Departments; and (ii) amount raised, in each of the past three years.

(AQW 1661/17-22)

Mr Murphy: There have been no specific revenue raising initiatives over the last three years, however departments routinely deliver savings in order to live within budgets.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Finance what plans he has to increase civil servants' pay to compensate for previous awards not keeping pace with inflation since 2007.

(AQO 80/17-22)

Mr Murphy: NICS pay awards in the past decade were determined in line with public sector pay policy and in a challenging financial environment. The non-ring fenced Resource DEL block grant has reduced in real terms by £530 million from 2010-11.

The 2019/20 NICS pay award has not yet been implemented. I have met with officials from NIPSA, the union for non-industrial civil servants, on 22 January and am committed to continued engagement with trade union colleagues to resolve the current dispute.

I am working closely with departmental officials to progress the NICS 2019/20 pay award for all civil service staff as a priority with a view to moving to multi-year pay awards in line with future budgets. My proposals will be brought to Executive colleagues for agreement in the next few weeks.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Finance what plans he has to introduce a business rates relief scheme.
(AQO 81/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department currently legislates for over £235 million in business rate support. The options for all relief provision for 2020/21 and beyond will need to be considered in the context of the recent Business Rates Consultation and the wider budgetary issues that face us as an Executive. I have already established that we simply could not afford the level of Small Business Rate Relief that is available in GB. However, we have Industrial Derating relief here that is no longer available elsewhere.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister of Finance whether he will review how statistics are gathered by NISRA and presented to ensure that rural inequalities are identified.
(AQO 82/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In line with the Rural Needs Act, NISRA publishes a variety of data at rural level. DAREA's Key Rural Issues document provides a useful summary of these data.

Concerns have been expressed in relation to the Multiple Deprivation Measure.

In an attempt to better reflect deprivation in rural areas the 2017 update included new indicators such as access to public transport and broadband.

However, because it is based on concentrations of deprivation, less densely populated rural areas invariably make up few of the 100 most deprived areas. Indeed only 3 of the 100 most deprived Super Output Areas are rural.

In this context the opportunity to improve data in rural areas is kept under review.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Finance what discussions he has had with HM Treasury regarding proposals in New Decade, New Approach.
(AQO 76/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The New Deal, New Approach document put forward a number of priorities to strengthen public services and tackle immediate challenges in health, education and housing together with growing the economy.

It is only right that the British Government, who published this document, play their part in providing a fair funding package.

I have a constructive initial meeting with Rishi Sunak, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury

Department of Finance officials are finalising work to quantify the costs of delivering the priorities set out in the New Decade, New Approach document. I hope to bring this work to the Executive for consideration shortly.

This will then form the basis for further engagement with the Treasury on the way forward to ensure that the British government contribute appropriately to the delivery of these priorities.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance for an update on public sector reforms, such as the Northern Ireland Public Sector Innovation Lab and The Change Fund.
(AQO 75/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The work of the Public Sector Reform Division, including the Innovation Lab, Business Consultancy Service, and Economic Advisory Unit has progressed well over the last three years. All aspects of its work have increased to support departments and the wider public sector to implement public sector reform, using expertise and customer/user focused approaches, including Behavioural Science, Service Design, and Process and Business Improvements.

The Change Fund has been closed since 2018. After funding projects and initiatives over a three year period, successful projects and initiatives have been embedded within relevant departmental approaches.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Finance, given the shortfall of at least £1 billion for public services next year, what measures he is considering to raise revenue.
(AQO 77/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My officials are currently working with all departments to analyse the funding pressures facing the Executive and quantify the cost of delivering the priorities in the New Decade, New Approach document.

In the course of agreeing a Budget for 2020-21 the Executive will consider the options available to address these pressures. This may include individual Ministers considering potential revenue raising options which fall within their policy area.

Looking forward, I am also keen to examine what additional fiscal levers the Executive might seek, including those that would enable us raise more revenue. I am considering the creation of a Fiscal Commission to look at this issue.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Finance what plans he has to reduce the cost of arm's-length bodies across the public sector.
(AQO 78/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In line with the commitment within New Decade, New Approach, there will be a review of Arm's Length Bodies with a view to their rationalisation. The Agreement outlines that the review will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of all Arm's Length Bodies with the aim of concluding the review and agreeing timescales for implementation within six months of the Executive being restored. I intend to bring a proposed terms of reference for the review to my Executive colleagues in the coming weeks.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance whether his departmental officials will work with the Department for the Economy to publish detailed assessments of the economic and fiscal impacts on Northern Ireland of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, including the impact if the UK does not conclude a new trade deal with the EU by December 2020.
(AQO 79/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I am a member of the Executive's Brexit Sub-committee that met for the first time last Tuesday. As part of that I will be working with all Departments and stakeholders, to develop and present an informed assessment of the impact of the Withdrawal Agreement, including any financial implications.

This will be ongoing over the coming weeks and months. Significant issues remain to be negotiated and decided around the implementation of the Protocol and the future relationship with the EU. A comprehensive assessment of the economic and fiscal impacts for the North of Ireland will only be possible as further detail emerges in this regard.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Finance when his Department will produce a costing of the commitments made in New Decade, New Approach.
(AQO 83/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The New Deal, New Approach document put forward a number of priorities to strengthen public services and tackle immediate challenges in health, education and housing together with growing the economy.

It is only right that the British Government, who published this document, play their part in providing a fair funding package.

I have a constructive initial meeting with Rishi Sunak, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Department of Finance officials are finalising work to quantify the costs of delivering the priorities set out in the New Decade, New Approach document. I hope to bring this work to the Executive for consideration shortly.

This will then form the basis for further engagement with the Treasury on the way forward to ensure that the British government contribute appropriately to the delivery of these priorities.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance what steps his Department is taking to assist local retailers following Reval 2020, the revaluation of business rates.
(AQO 84/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The revaluation adjusts rateable values to reflect changes in the property market over the past five years. It is well understood that the retail sector has faced a challenging time in recent years. This is reflected in the results of Reval2020 in terms of the retail sector, as 75% of retail properties will see no change or a decrease in their valuation. My Department already legislates for over £235 million in business rate support. The options for relief provision in 2020/21 including Small Business Rate Relief, will need to be considered in the context of the wider budgetary issues that face us as an Executive and the decisions around the 2020/21 Regional Rate.

Department of Health

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health whether his departmental targets for the adult Gender Identity Service are being met; and what action his Department is taking to ensure these targets will be met in the future.
(AQW 667/17-22)

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): In recent years, the adult Gender Identity Service in Northern Ireland has experienced a considerable growth in demand for its services. The service has also faced significant staffing resource challenges therefore it has not been able to meet departmental targets for waiting times. In March 2019 my Department instructed the Health and Social Care Board to conduct a review of Gender Identity Services. The review is currently underway and will identify a suitable model of care which will help meet the needs of service users in Northern Ireland and address current waiting times.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health for an update on his Department's plans to provide additional parking at the Royal Victoria Hospital.
(AQW 766/17-22)

Mr Swann: Any plans for additional car parking on the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) site require planning approval from Belfast City Council. As part of this process the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is currently developing a site specific Travel Plan with a view to reducing the dependency on cars for travel to the RVH Site. This will build on existing initiatives which ensure that car parking is prioritised to meet operational needs and improve patient access.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) the current respite services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) his plans to improve the provision of respite services in the Trust.

(AQW 870/17-22)

Mr Swann: In support of carers and those they care for, the Western Trust provides a wide range of respite services. These include short-breaks in residential and nursing care homes, Spruce House (Altnagelvin Area Hospital), and foster carers.

In addition, and given the drive towards personalisation, the Trust also supports a growing number of bespoke person-centred arrangements through the provision of direct payments, allowing carers/families to avail of a short break in a way tailored to their specific need.

The Trust also have a number of contracts with the Independent Sector, particularly in relation to nursing need.

In terms of future developments, the Western Trust is working with Mencap and Golden Lane in the development of a short breaks facility in Enniskillen and Strabane, as well as early phase discussions regarding a site in Limavady. The Trust is also committed to maximising the effective utilisation of all Trust owned facilities, which may in the short-medium term realise some further short-break capacity.

The Trust continues to explore other respite opportunities and partnership work is on-going with individuals and/or their carers to develop respite services that meets their individual needs.

Finally, Carer Support Plans and personal budgets for carers are new initiatives in order to increase short break provision for carers.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister of Health when he will publish the findings of the Reshaping Breast Assessment Services consultation.

(AQW 918/17-22)

Mr Swann: The public consultation on 'Reshaping Breast Assessment Services' closed on 30 August 2019, with 4,630 written responses received.

My officials are in the process of finalising the consultation analysis. I will make an announcement on the future of breast assessment services once I have had the opportunity to consider the analysis.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount paid out to patients for treatment under Directive 2011/24/EU, patients' rights in cross-border healthcare in another European economic area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 925/17-22)

Mr Swann: The table below provides the amount paid out to patients for treatment under the EU Cross Border Directive in each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Number of patients reimbursed	Total costs Reimbursed through the EU Cross Border Directive
2015/16	63	£132,213
2016/17	82	£262,807
2017/18	250	£1,103,843
2018/19	605	£2,972,196
2019/20*	820	£3,860,786

Notes:

2019-2020* costs calculated up until 31st December 2019

Patients may not have been reimbursed in the same year as their applications were approved.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health how many applications were (i) received; and (ii) approved for treatment under Directive 2011/24/EU, patients' rights in cross-border healthcare in another European economic area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 926/17-22)

Mr Swann: The table below provides the number of applications received and approved for treatment under the EU Cross Border Directive in each of the last five years.

Financial year	EU Cross Border Directive Applications Received	EU Cross Border Directive Approvals
2015-2016	83	63

Financial year	EU Cross Border Directive Applications Received	EU Cross Border Directive Approvals
2016-2017	170	138
2017-2018	473	409
2018-2019	964	918
2019-2020	1345	1162 *

*April 2019 to 29th January 2020

Patients who have been approved may not have proceeded with treatment outside Northern Ireland

Patients may not submit receipts in the same year as approval.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health when he plans to make the drug Kuvan available to those with phenylketonuria.
(AQW 930/17-22)

Mr Swann: I would refer the Member to my response to AQW 450/17-22 regarding access to Kuvan in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health how many full-time equivalent nursing posts remained unfilled in each of the last three years.

(AQW 931/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of registered nurse positions that are vacant and actively being recruited to at 30 September in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below:

Date	Registered Nurse Vacancies Actively Being Recruited To
30 September 2017	1,403
30 September 2018	1,922
30 September 2019	2,269

Source: Recruitment & Selection Shared Services (BSO)

This information is published on a quarterly basis at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/staff-vacancies>.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health whether he has any plans to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol.
(AQW 933/17-22)

Mr Swann: The harms caused by consumption of alcohol are a major public health issue in Northern Ireland. The introduction of legislation for Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcohol has the potential to be a key population-level health measure to address this issue and I will give this consideration as part of the development of a new substance misuse strategy for Northern Ireland. I am also keen to learn from the evidence generated in Scotland, where early evaluation results are now being published on the real world impact of the Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcohol legislation, following the introduction of the measure there in 2018.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to outline his Department's plans for Northfield House in Donaghadee.
(AQW 988/17-22)

Mr Swann: Northfield House is currently providing a 'step down' service from hospital for short term placements. It has currently a capacity of 21 beds.

In the interim the facility will continue to provide a short term care service.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health what proportion of prescriptions issued in each of the last five years have been generic products.

(AQW 1001/17-22)

Mr Swann: Not all prescriptions issued are subsequently dispensed and presented for payment, so the number of prescriptions issued is not known centrally. The Generic Dispensing Rate for Prescription items in each of the last 5 financial years is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Generic Dispensing Rate¹ of prescription items² in Northern Ireland, in each of the last 5 financial years

Financial Year	Generic Dispensing Rate ¹
2014/15	71.97%

Financial Year	Generic Dispensing Rate ¹
2015/16	73.65%
2016/17	74.22%
2017/18	74.63%
2018/19	74.82%

Source: HSC Business Services Organisation

- 1 Calculated as an average of monthly rates.
- 2 A prescription item is a single supply of a medicine, dressing or appliance written on a prescription form. If a prescription form includes three medicines it is counted as three prescription items.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health to detail the timescale for the roll out of multi-disciplinary teams to the Western and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts; and to outline the proposed composition of each team.

(AQW 1007/17-22)

Mr Swann: Roll out of the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) model in the Western Trust began with the Derry GP Federation in September 2018. In October 2019, in-year roll out of the model expanded to the Southern Trust in the Newry and District GP Federation. Recruitment in both areas is currently ongoing.

Further roll out to other GP Federations in these areas, as with those across the rest of Northern Ireland, will continue, dependent on development of appropriate plans, and the availability of resources, appropriate staffing and investment in GP accommodation, with an estimated completion date of 2026.

The composition of MDTs involves establishing new roles, including physiotherapists, mental health specialists and social workers. They are based in GP practices, working alongside doctors and existing practice teams. They will be supported by increased levels of health visitors and district nurses to better meet the needs of the local population.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the current budget for the Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS); (ii) the fire cover for each station broken down by (a) full; and (b) part-time staff; and (iii) the whole-time equivalent for NIFRS staff from 2015 onwards, broken down by staff roles.

(AQW 1008/17-22)

Mr Swann: (i)

Year	NIFRS Budget £m
2015/2016	72.7
2016/2017	72.8
2017/2018	74.4
2018/2019	73.7
2019/2020	80.2

- (ii) The table below details the fire cover in each Fire Station broken down by Whole-time (full) and On Call (part-time) staff:

Station	a) Station Establishment Whole-time 2019	Interim Station Establishment Whole-time Post 12 Aug 19	b) Station Establishment On Call
Central	48	28	
Knock	48	48	
Cadogan	52	52	
Whitla	48	48	
Springfield	48	48	
Westland	28	28	
Glengormley	28	28	14

Station	a) Station Establishment Whole-time 2019	Interim Station Establishment Whole-time Post 12 Aug 19	b) Station Establishment On Call
Ballymena	28	28	12
Lisburn	28	28	14
Antrim	8	8	20
Carrickfergus	8	5	20
Coleraine	8	8	20
Bangor	28	28	12
Lurgan	28	28	12
Newry	28	28	14
Newtownards	8	5	20
Portadown	8	5	22
Armagh	8	5	22
Crescent Link	48	40	12
Northland	48	48	
Enniskillen	8	5	20
Omagh	8	5	24**
Ballymoney			20
Whitehead			12
Ballyclare			20
Cushendall			12
Carnlough			12
Larne			20
Portrush			20*
Kilrea			14
Portstewart			20*
Ballycastle			20
Crumlin			12
Irvinestown			14
Limavady			20
Magherafelt			20
Cookstown			20
Dungannon			20
Strabane			22
Dromore (Co Tyrone)			12
Clogher			20
Castledearg			20*
Lisnaskea			20
Maghera			20
Belleek			12
Fintona			12

Station	a) Station Establishment Whole-time 2019	Interim Station Establishment Whole-time Post 12 Aug 19	b) Station Establishment On Call
Newtownstewart			12
Dungiven			14
Pomeroy			14
Newcastle			22
Carryduff			12
Crossmaglen			12
Comber			12
Portaferry			12
Downpatrick		3	20
Warrenpoint			22
Ballynahinch			20
Banbridge			20
Kilkeel			20
Ballywalter			12
Donaghadee			12
Newtownhamilton			20*
Keady			12
Dromore (Co Down)			14
Holywood			20*
Rathfriland			20*
Rathlin#			12
Total	600	557 ^	862

* Establishment level temporarily reduced from 20 to 14 pending review of NIFRS service delivery model

** Establishment level temporarily reduced from 24 to 22 pending review of NIFRS service delivery model

Rathlin Rescue Station is crewed by local Volunteer Firefighters

^ Reduction in establishment due to the interim service delivery model will not correlate to a reduction in staff numbers. The interim establishment allows NIFRS flexibility in how firefighters are utilised and deployed on a daily basis rather than being restricted to a station based response model.

(iii) The table below details the whole-time equivalent for NIFRS staff from 2015:

Year	Whole-time	*On-Call	Controls	Support	Agency	Total
31/03/2015	878	969	47	207.5	31.5	2,133
31/03/2016	852	944	53	201.5	36	2,086.5
31/03/2017	818	955	53.5	187.5	42.5	2,056.5
31/03/2018	844	948	53.5	176.5	54.5	2,076.5
31/03/2019	834	872	57.5	178	47.5	1,989
31/12/2019	823	897	55.5	188.5	34	1,998

* On-Call figures in headcount. Other figures provided are Full Time Equivalent (FTE) at the specified dates. These do not reflect the average figures for each of the years which are used for the purposes of reporting in the annual accounts.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health (i) to outline his plans to develop a workforce strategy; and (ii) whether it will include (a) addressing current vacancies within Health and Social Care; (b) the capacity to train new and existing staff; and (c) retention plans.

(AQW 1009/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department published its 'Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026' in May 2018: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-and-social-care-workforce-strategy-2026>

The Strategy outlines 24 actions across 10 themes designed to attract, recruit and retain the workforce necessary for delivering world class health and social care. These include strategic, long term, workforce planning of an optimum workforce model for future reconfigured services; the sufficient availability of high-quality training and development; and making Health and Social Care a fulfilling and rewarding place to work where people feel valued and supported.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health whether he will review the adequacy of the law to ensure that only accredited assistance dogs can be lawfully used.

(AQW 1029/17-22)

Mr Swann: While voluntary accreditation exists for those organisations which train assistance dogs, the law in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK does not require assistance dogs to be accredited. I would be happy to review any representation regarding issues caused by this position.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health to list community and voluntary groups which receive Public Health Agency funding for support through drugs and alcohol addiction.

(AQW 1034/17-22)

Mr Swann: The following community and voluntary groups have received Public Health Agency funding in 2019/20 to address substance misuse:

Community and/or voluntary group	Main type of funding
Addiction NI	Procured contract(s)
Arc Healthy Living Centre	Procured contract(s)
ASCERT	Procured contract(s)
Barnardos	Procured contract(s)
Council for the Homeless NI	Procured contract(s)
DePaul Ireland	Procured contract(s)
Dunlewey	Procured contract(s)
Extern NI	Procured contract(s)
Fermanagh New Horizons	Procured contract(s)
Lisburn YMCA	Procured contract(s)
NI Alcohol & Drug Alliance	Procured contract(s)
Simon Community	Procured contract(s)
Start 360	Procured contract(s)
Forward South Partnership	Small grant
Ballymacash Regeneration Network	Small grant
Canal Boxing Academy	Small grant
Footprints Women's Centre	Small grant
Resurgam Community Development Trust	Small grant
Hollywood Family Trust	Small grant
Russell Gaelic Union	Small grant
Newcastle YMCA	Small grant
Redburn Loughview Community Forum	Small grant
Dennett Interchange	Small grant
Drive Project	Small grant

Community and/or voluntary group	Main type of funding
Dungiven Celtic	Small grant
Na Magha Hurling & Camogie	Small grant
Glens Community Association	Small grant

It is important to note that other services funded or commissioned by the Public Health Agency under the thematic areas of promoting mental health, suicide prevention and sexual health and teenage pregnancy also contribute to the wider landscape of available resources invested within the community & voluntary sectors in tackling substance misuse

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health to list community and voluntary groups in North Belfast which receive suicide prevention funding from the Public Health Agency.

(AQW 1035/17-22)

Mr Swann: The list below covers groups that are located, and provide a service only to clients based in, the North Belfast area; and also services which are funded by PHA on a Belfast Health and Social Care Trust wide basis, which are open to residents living in the north of the city.

Community and/or voluntary group	Main type of funding
Aware Defeat Depression	Direct Funding
Rainbow Project	Direct Funding
Holy Trinity Centre	Direct Funding
Urban Scale Intervention	Direct Funding
Inspire	Direct Funding
Aware	Small Grant
Belfast Area Domestic & Sexual Violence Partnership	Small Grant
Dunlewey Addiction Services Ltd	Small Grant
Every Day Harmony Music	Small Grant
Learning to Grow (Blossoms at Larne Lough)	Small Grant
Lighthouse	Small Grant
Ashton Community Trust	Small Grant
Barnardos	Small Grant
BTCV (The Conservation Volunteers)	Small Grant
East Belfast Independent Advice Centre	Small Grant
Extern	Small Grant
MACS Supporting Young People	Small Grant
New Life Counselling	Small Grant
Start 360	Small Grant
GLOW	Small Grant
Groundwork NI	Small Grant
IMAGO/Oasis Caring in Action	Small Grant
Lagan Dragons Dragon Boat Club	Small Grant
Shankill Women's Centre	Small Grant
Specialisterne NI	Small Grant
TAMHI	Small Grant
Volunteer Now	Small Grant

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health when he will make drugs such as Kalydeco, Orkambi and Symkevi available for the treatment of cystic fibrosis.

(AQW 1036/17-22)

Mr Swann: The drugs Kalydeco, Orkambi and Symkevi are available for all cystic fibrosis patients in Northern Ireland who are considered suitable for treatment by their medical consultant.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health what contact his Department has had with the Department of Health in Dublin on the provision of local paediatric pathology services, instead of the current arrangements of travelling to England.

(AQW 1043/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department has held a number of discussions with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) to explore the option for an all-island network model to deliver these services. Colleagues there have indicated that due to capacity constraints within the pathology service in the ROI, it would not be possible for them to provide a service for Northern Ireland in the short term.

The development of a potential all-island paediatric pathology service will therefore have to be a longer term solution. My Department is continuing to discuss this matter with counterparts in ROI to establish the feasibility of an all-island service. The feasibility assessment would include: the recruitment and training of paediatric pathologists; the location(s) for the delivery of the service; and, the governance, funding and regulation of such an all-island service across two separate jurisdictions.

In the meantime, my Department's priority is to ensure that bereaved parents receive pathology reports as quickly as possible and I am reassured that, from the initial feedback received, parents have felt supported by the interim service provided by Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, Liverpool.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the current number of GP vacancies.

(AQW 1050/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of vacant GP posts is not available. GPs are independent contractors who contract with the Health and Social Care Board to provide primary medical services to their patients. As independent contractors, GPs are responsible for identifying and recruiting the number of GPs and other staff required to deliver those services.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how is he going to address the shortfall in the number of nurses.

(AQW 1051/17-22)

Mr Swann: Since 2016/17 the Department has been increasing incrementally the number of pre-registration nursing and midwifery at local universities, providing 1025 places in 2019/20. This represents an increase of almost 45% over this period.

Going forward, the Executive has committed to deliver an extra 900 nursing and midwifery undergraduate places over three years. My Department is leading on the commissioning of these additional undergraduate places, with 300 per year over the next three years from the local higher education providers: Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University and The Open University.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many pre-registration nurse training places are available on an annual basis.

(AQW 1054/17-22)

Mr Swann: In 2019/20 the number of commissioned pre-registration nurse training places commissioned by the Department of Health reached an all time high of 1,025, representing an increase of almost 45% on the 2015 level.

I anticipate further increases in this number for the year 20/21.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how he plans to address the lack of employment rights and trade union recognition for domiciliary care workers in the private sector.

(AQW 1069/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department is currently considering a number of recommendations from the Power to People report recognising the skills, values and attributes of people who work in adult social care as well as pay and conditions across the social care workforce.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health whether he will ensure that the Health Service is the main body through which waiting lists will be addressed, and that it has the first opportunity to do so.

(AQW 1070/17-22)

Mr Swann: The primacy of using in-house HSC capacity to address waiting lists has been a long standing principle for my Department and I am committed to this approach moving forward.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the number of attendees to each Emergency Department in each month of the last three years.

(AQW 1078/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of attendances (new and unplanned reviews). Information on the number of monthly attendances at Emergency Departments, including Minor Injury Units, is published on a quarterly basis and available to view or download from:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hs-niwts-ecwt-data-q3-19-20.html>

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health to detail any capital bids by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust under consideration by his Department.

(AQW 1079/17-22)

Mr Swann: My officials are currently working on a capital planning review exercise to inform a long term assessment of likely future capital requirements. In response to this exercise the Southern Health and Social Care Trust have submitted the following proposals. The ability to take forward these proposals will be subject to future budget availability and Value for Money.

- Armagh Community Treatment and Care Centre - £15m
- Craigavon Area Hospital Redevelopment Phase 1 - £225m
- Crossmaglen Day Care Centre - £8.7m
- Daisyhill Hospital Phased Redevelopment - £65m
- Daisyhill Hospital Bed Evacuation Strategy - £6.2m
- Dungannon Community Treatment and Care Centre - £30m
- Interim Scheme – Additional Bed Capacity - £12.4m
- Interim Scheme – Day Surgery Unit - £13.2m
- Interim Scheme – Emergency Department Extension - £1.6m
- Low voltage works at Craigavon and Daisyhill Hospitals - £8.2m
- Lurgan Community Treatment and Care Centre - £20m
- Minor works schemes - £27m
- Oakridge Day Care Centre - £8.1m

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the number of attendees to each Minor Injury Unit in each month of the last three years.

(AQW 1080/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of attendances (new and unplanned reviews). Information on the number of monthly attendances at Emergency Departments, including Minor Injury Units, is published on a quarterly basis and available to view or download from:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hs-niwts-ecwt-data-q3-19-20.html>

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health for an update on the proposed health hub for Newry; and when he expects the facility to be open.

(AQW 1081/17-22)

Mr Swann: The planning application for Newry Community Treatment and Care Centre was approved at Newry Mourne and Downe District Council's Planning Committee meeting in December 2019.

The Southern Trust is now working with the Health and Social Care Board to submit a final business case to my Department for consideration.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health to list the GP surgeries that have closed in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1083/17-22)

Mr Swann: Between January 2017 and December 2019 the number of GP practices reduced by 20, of which only 4 were closures. 16 practices amalgamated with larger practices, with 6 continuing to operate from the existing premises. The surgery changes in each of the 3 years are:

January-December 2017

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ■ Dr McComb (E36) | ■ Tempo Medical Centre (W586) |
| ■ Dr Glover (N386) | ■ Harland Medical Practice (E23) |
| ■ Dr Heanen and McConaghy (P478) | |
| ■ Dr Leary (W561) | |
| ■ Dr Devlin (569) | |

January-December 2018

- Dr Sloan & Partners (S541)
- Dr Murty (S517)
- Dr Kirby and Kirby (W581)
- Dr Fitzpatrick (E267)
- Dr Whew (W583)
- Dr Moss, Patten and Cobain (N329)

January-December 2019

- Dr McMullan and Gribben (P506)
- Dr Thompson, Paisley & Smith (P493)
- Dr Daniel Wylie (PC95)
- Dr Jim Bisset (PC263)
- City View (PC51)
- Dr McBrien (PC5)
- Dr Thompson (PC162)

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Valley Nursing Home, following the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority inspection.

(AQW 1096/17-22)

Mr Swann: On 27 January 2020, RQIA conducted an unannounced inspection at Valley Nursing Home, Clogher. RQIA's inspection team remained concerned about the poor quality of care at this home, however there was no immediate risk to its patients. On 28 January the current registered provider (Mr Paul Warren-Gray, Valley Nursing Home (MPS) Ltd) notified RQIA of his intention to cancel his registration. A new provider with a proven track record in achieving significant improvement in other homes has advised RQIA of its intention to apply for the registration of this service. RQIA will consider this provider's application and plans to deliver the required improvements at this service, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every patient at Valley Nursing Home.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health for an update on the proposed new health hub in Dungannon.

(AQW 1097/17-22)

Mr Swann: Plans for a new Primary and Community Care Centre in Dungannon are included in the Primary Care Infrastructure Draft Strategic Implementation Plan.

I will consider alongside other capital investment priorities, with the final outcome being dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the planned capital projects involving GP surgeries, including (i) start dates; and (ii) finish dates.

(AQW 1098/17-22)

Mr Swann: A number of capital projects including GP surgeries are ongoing. Dates are as follows.

The construction of the new Lisburn Primary Care Centre commenced in April 2019 and is due to complete in 2021.

In addition, the tables in Annex A detail the smaller planned capital projects involving GP surgeries for 2019/20.

Future Capital Projects will be dependent on budgetary allocations, as well as business case approval from the Department of Finance.

Annex A

Table 1 Capital Schemes commenced and completed in 2019/20 (as at 30th January 2020)

Area	Practice	Project commenced	Completion
Southern	Church Walk Surgery, Lurgan	July 2019	January 2020
Southern	South Tyrone Hospital (Mid Ulster Healthcare)	November 2019	January 2020
Southern	Banbridge Group	December 2019	January 2020
Southern	Old Forge, Annalong	January 2020	January 2020
Southern	Clanrye Medical Practice	January 2020	January 2020
Southern	Dr Forshaw & Partners, Clanrye	January 2020	January 2020
Southern	Meadowlands, Newry Health Village	January 2020	January 2020
Western	Clarendon Medical – Hotdesks	July 2019	July 2019
Western	Bovally Health Centre	March 2019	July 2019
Western	Western Rural Health Centre – Castlederg	April 2019	April 2019

Area	Practice	Project commenced	Completion
Western	Bridge Street Practices, Cityside	December 2019	January 2020
South Eastern	Clough	July 2019	November 2019
South Eastern	Killyleagh Surgery	October 2019	February 2020
South Eastern	Lodge Health	November 2019	November 2019
South Eastern	Bushmills Surgery	November 2019	November 2019
South Eastern	Garvagh Sugery	October 2019	November 2019
South Eastern	Rasharkin	October 2019	November 2019

Table 2 Capital Schemes commenced in 2019/20 due to complete by 31st March 2020

Area	Practice	Project commenced	Completion
Southern	Gilford Health Centre	September 2019	March 2020
Southern	O'Reilly, King and McKinley Camlough Branch	January 2020	March 2020
Southern	Dr Mulligan Cornmarket Surgery	January 2020	March 2020
Southern	Cornmarket	January 2020	March 2020
Southern	Newtownhamilton Health Centre	February 2020	March 2020
Southern	Dr Fee, Crossmaglen Health Centre	February 2020	March 2020
Southern	Summerhill Surgery, Warrenpoint	February 2020	March 2020
Belfast	Dunluce Health Centre	February 2020	March 2020
Belfast	Crocus Street Surgery	February 2020	March 2020
Belfast	Maureen Sheehan Centre	February 2020	March 2020
Belfast	Dunville	February 2020	March 2020
Belfast	Dr Dugan	February 2020	March 2020
Western	Clarendon Medical - Extension	November 2019	March 2020
Western	Western Rural Health Centre – Castledearg Extension	December 2019	March 2020
Western	Aberfoyle Medical Practice	March 2019	March 2020
Western	Dr Doherty, Clarendon Street	February 2020	March 2020
Western	Three Spires Practice	January 2020	March 2020
South Eastern	Donard Group Practice	September 2019	March 2020
South Eastern	Dr Shelvin & Partners	November 2019	March 2020
South Eastern	Crossgar	February 2020	March 2020
Northern	Kilrea Health Centre	March 2020	March 2020
Northern	Froces Medical Centre	February 2020	March 2020

Table 3 Capital Schemes commenced in 2019/20 due to complete post 31st March 2020

Trust Area	Practice	Project commenced	Completion
Southern	Dr McVerry/McEvoy Medical Centre, Newry Health Village	January 2020	April 2020
Belfast	Grosvenor Road Surgery	February 2020	April 2020
Belfast	Dr Bonnar, Hillhead Family Practice	February 2020	May 2020
Western	Mourneside	March 2020	TBC

Trust Area	Practice	Project commenced	Completion
Western	Bridge Street Practices, Cityside, Refurb	March 2020	July 2020
Western	Waterside Healthcentre	December 2019	June 2020
South Eastern	Crossgar Surgery	September 2019	March 2021
South Eastern	Green Surgery	November 2019	April 2020
Northern	Old Bank Surgery	February 2020	October 2020
Northern	Coleraine Health Centre	January 2020	July 2020
Northern	Killowen Health Centre	March 2020	March 2021
Northern	Mountsandel Surgery	January 2020	June 2020
Northern	Ballymoney Health Centre	December 2019	July 2020
Northern	Country Medical Centre	March 2020	March 2021
Northern	Ballycastle Health Centre	January 2020	July 2020

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health why the £0.3m handed back under Reduced Requirements in the January Monitoring Round went unspent on the Foyle Suicide Project.

(AQW 1107/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department was allocated £250,000 of funding from the Programme for Government Transformation fund, through in-year monitoring, for administrative expenditure related to the Our Future Foyle cross departmental project. The Public Health Agency and the other Departments involved in Future Foyle were able to meet the administrative costs and support business case development by the time this allocation occurred and so this funding was therefore no longer required. Our future Foyle suffered no financial pressure or other detriment as a result of the funding not being used.

As this funding is ring-fenced, it could not be allocated elsewhere and was therefore declared as a reduced requirement in the January Monitoring Round. Business cases are already under development for further work on Our Future Foyle and I hope to visit the design team for this project in the near future.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health whether he proposes to replicate updates to screening for cervical cancer which are proceeding in England.

(AQW 1109/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health & Social Care sector in Northern Ireland is carrying out work to assess the actions required to introduce Human Papillomavirus (HPV) testing, and the associated costs and benefits. This will then help to inform a policy decision on the introduction of the HPV test as the primary screening test within the Northern Ireland cervical cancer screening programme.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Shared Lives project, which supports adults with a learning disability and older people; and what consideration is being given to extend the project into the next financial year.

(AQW 1110/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), together with representatives from Shared Lives Plus and Trust staff from both Learning Disability and Older People, are working to develop a framework to support the expansion of shared lives which will ensure consistent delivery across the region. This framework is expected to be completed by March 2020. Work is also on-going to have regionally agreed awareness raising and publicity material to promote the work of shared lives.

Discussions continue to determine how best the shared lives model could potentially be expanded for people with learning disability and developed for older people. A business case is being developed to identify the level of recurrent funding required. However, challenges in relation to the release of short to medium term funding to develop the approach and the challenging wider financial position, will need to be considered.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what consideration he is giving to pay parity for dentists, particularly for dental core trainees.

(AQW 1112/17-22)

Mr Swann: Medical and Dental trainees in England have been on a different medical contract to those in Northern Ireland since 2016. Any change to the Northern Ireland contract would be a matter for negotiation

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, in the wake of NISRA drug overdose statistics for 2018, whether he has any plans to establish a drugs death taskforce.

(AQW 1121/17-22)

Mr Swann: The latest official figures highlight the continuing challenge facing us to prevent and address harms related to the misuse of drugs – both in terms of illegal drugs and the inappropriate use of prescription medicines. The latest figures are worryingly the highest on record and they follow the trends seen in England, Scotland and Wales in 2018.

Each and every drug-related death is preventable and it is a key priority for my Department – working with the Health & Social Care sector, the Department of Justice, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland – to tackle this growing issue.

My Department has begun the development of a new substance misuse strategy and this was reflected in the “New Decade, New Approach” deal. I plan to ensure this new strategy is developed and designed with input from all key stakeholders, including service users, to ensure we improve services and take innovative and effective action to reduce alcohol and drug related harm.

There are a range of structures already in place to oversee our response to alcohol and drug misuse – these involve the Criminal Justice sector, Health & Social Care, PSNI, academics, the Voluntary & Community Sector, and service users. I am keen that we look at the effectiveness of our existing structures, and I will review the need for a Drug Taskforce as we develop our new substance misuse strategy.

I am ready to work with other Ministers and Departments to address the underlying causes of substance misuse, such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness and loneliness, as well as providing treatment services and assistance to those with concurrent mental health issues. It is only by working holistically across all these issues that we will truly create the conditions to help prevent alcohol and drug related deaths.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health what safety measures are in place for children placed in a single room in hospitals, in case of requirement of emergency medical treatment.

(AQW 1128/17-22)

Mr Swann: Each Trust has protocols in place to ensure the safety of children in single rooms in hospitals in the event that emergency medical treatment is required.

Examples of measures in place include – emergency call buttons in each room; a bedside handover process which highlights any children with higher acuity – these children will be moved closer to the nursing station; handover processes making staff aware of the level of supervision required by any child, based on their clinical assessment; parental involvement (as many parents stay over with their children) where parents are trained in how to use the emergency buzzer; audible alarms on equipment monitoring a child’s vital signs; use of the regionally agreed Paediatric Early Warning Signs chart, which facilitates early detection of deterioration through prompting review at specific trigger points; frequent monitoring; assessment of suitability for a child to be placed in a side room; and, one to one care, where necessary.

There are then procedures in place for alerting the relevant medical professionals and administering the appropriate treatment, should an emergency arise.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health why Castlederg Fire Station is operating with only 13 fire officers, given that the station has two fire engines and a number of successful applicants to the NIFRS remain on a waiting list following a recruitment process.

(AQW 1134/17-22)

Mr Swann: Castlederg is one of seven on-call stations where staffing levels have been temporarily reduced pending a full review of the service delivery model.

There are currently 14 on call firefighters at Castlederg Station. 4 candidates from the reserve list have been conditionally offered a post within the Station to manage forecasted attrition rates.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health (i) whether there is an ongoing review into Fire Service provision at the Castlederg Station; (ii) when the review will be completed; and (iii) whether the conclusions will be made public.

(AQW 1135/17-22)

Mr Swann: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) is currently reviewing its service delivery model across Northern Ireland. Castlederg Station is included within that review. NIFRS aims to complete the review of its service delivery model in September 2020.

NIFRS will conduct a public consultation exercise on any proposed permanent changes to its service delivery model following the review.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health why child post-mortem examinations are carried out in England.

(AQW 1137/17-22)

Mr Swann: Following the resignation of the sole Paediatric Pathologist in Northern Ireland (NI), it was necessary to secure an interim arrangement with Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, Liverpool to ensure that a perinatal and paediatric pathology service for hospital consented post-mortem examinations can continue to be offered.

Significant efforts have been and continue to be, made by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to retain a service within NI, including repeated recruitment drives both nationally and internationally. Paediatric pathology is a very small specialist area and the challenges in retaining and recruiting consultants are not unique to NI.

Further background information on the interim service, including frequently asked questions can be found on the Health and Social Care Board's website:

<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-ork/commissioning/perinatal-and-paediatric-pathology/>

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health to detail the assistance currently available to patients and their families, who have been infected with, or otherwise affected by HIV, Hepatitis C, or both, following treatment with NHS-supplied blood, tissue or blood products; and in light of the January monitoring round, how he plans to improve this assistance.

(AQW 1145/17-22)

Mr Swann: Financial support available to patients and their families who have been infected with, or otherwise affected by HIV, Hepatitis C, or both, following treatment with NHS-supplied blood, tissue or blood products, includes:

- monthly or quarterly ex-gratia payments for infected beneficiaries (rates depending on individual circumstances);
- one-off ex-gratia lump sum payments - £20,000 for stage 1 Hep C; £50,000 for those who progress to stage 2;
- one-off ex-gratia lump sum payments for HIV - ranging from £21,500 to £80,000 depending on circumstances;
- £10,000 one-off lump sum for partners or spouses at the time of death of a primary beneficiary where the HIV/hepatitis C infection contributed to the death of their partner or spouse;
- annual winter fuel payment (£531);
- discretionary one-off grant support e.g. for respite breaks;
- discretionary income top-up support (means-tested).

Details of current rates are available on the BSO website at: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2876.htm>. Following the January monitoring round, I announced interim payments ranging from £4,000 to £8,000 per person for people who were diagnosed with Hepatitis C or HIV after receiving NHS-supplied infected blood. I hope to announce further support before the end of this financial year, informed by a wider ongoing review of overall provision.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health whether he will meet with TransgenderNI to hear and respond to their concerns about access to trans healthcare.

(AQW 1155/17-22)

Mr Swann: I will be convening a round table discussion in the near future to discuss LGBT issues and Transgender NI are amongst the groups who I shall be inviting to participate. I am also willing to arrange a further meeting with Trans NI to discuss transgender healthcare matters once the Gender Identity Service Pathway Review Group has made more progress on identifying a service model that will meet the increasing demand for gender identity services in Northern Ireland. In addition to this, I have offered a meeting with a senior official from my Department to discuss the various issues that Trans NI have raised.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 197/17-22, and given his Department's endorsement of NICE Guideline NG144 and NICE technical appraisals TA614 and TA615, (i) what actions are being taken, or need to be taken, to implement these technical appraisals; and (ii) when THC:CBD will be available to patients.

(AQW 1164/17-22)

Mr Swann: Technology Appraisals TA614 and TA615 will be implemented as set out in Circular HSC (SQSD) 2/13 which is available from: www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/hsc-sqsd-2-13.pdf

The NICE Clinical Guideline NG144 on Cannabis-based Medicinal Products will be implemented as set out in Circular HSC (SQSD) 3/13 which is available from: www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/hsc-sqsd-3-13.pdf

Products that contain Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) or cannabidiol (CBD) can be accessed by patients: either as a medicine with a marketing authorisation; as part of a clinical trial; or as a "special" medicine supplied through existing Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) licensed routes.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Health whether he will review the availability of changing places toilets for outpatients in health centres.

(AQW 1171/17-22)

Mr Swann: All Hospitals within Northern Ireland currently provide public ambulant toilets and wheelchair accessible toilets, which allow a wheelchair user to independently use the facilities.

In facilities where services are delivered specifically to service users with profound physical disabilities such as Specialist Education Centres, a "Changing Places" type of toilet facility is provided.

Officials from the Department of Health met with the Northern Ireland MENCAP Campaign Manager for Changing Places facilities in November 2009. Subsequent to this meeting, the provision of a “changing places” type of toilet facility has been considered at design stage in all new health buildings including health centres.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what consideration she has giving to expanding the Social Work Incentive Scheme, to include courses taken at the Open University by students resident in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 1175/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Social Work Student Incentive Scheme is available to students domiciled in NI who gain a place on an approved NI Degree in Social Work course. At present, the Degree in Social Work offered by the Open University is not approved and accredited by the NI Social Care Council. The NI Social Care Council is currently considering an application for the approval of the Degree in Social Work from the Open University.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health how many people in Belfast have been administered Naloxone, to reverse heroin overdose, by Health and Social Care staff between 1 December 2019 and 27 January 2020.
(AQW 1189/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust advised the figure is Nil for the period between 1 December 2019 and 27 January 2020.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service advised that data on the administration of Naloxone is currently captured on a manual record known as a Patient Report Form. However, for the request period of 1 December 2019 to 27 January 2020, not all Patient Record Forms have yet been received to be able to extract this information. Therefore, at this time, the data is not complete for the request period.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health whether his Department plans to increase the funds in the Protect Life 2 - Suicide Prevention Strategy.
(AQW 1190/17-22)

Mr Swann: Additional recurrent funding of £3-4 million per annum is required to fully implement the Health actions of Protect Life 2 – A Strategy for Preventing Suicide and Self Harm in Northern Ireland 2019-2024.

As part of the Budget 2020/21 process the Department has submitted bids to the Department of Finance to secure additional funding to support the implementation of this Strategy.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health how many prisoners in (i) Maghaberry; (ii) Magilligan; and (iii) Hydebank Wood are receiving counselling and emotional support.
(AQW 1191/17-22)

Mr Swann: All people who come in to prison are offered emotional support by the Prison Healthcare team and are seen by nursing staff several times in the first week of arrival. Additional support is provided as required from that point onwards.

The numbers of prisoners currently engaging with Mental Health and Addiction services are outlined in the table below.

	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank	Total
Start 360	112	110	59	281
Mental Health & Addiction Service	182	119	108	409
Total	294	229	167	690

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provide a Prison Healthcare Clinical Addiction Service (CAS). This service is provided in Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood and gives prisoners access to a team consisting of a Consultant Psychiatrist for Addictions, Special Interest GPs and addiction nurses.

Individuals referred to the CAS are assessed and offered a range of interventions depending on clinical need, for example, psychosocial interventions or Opiate Substitution Therapy.

All patients involved with the clinical addiction service can also access a range of mental health and occupational therapy programmes, such as Positive Steps, Living Life to the Full, Relaxation Classes, Art & Drama activities and Life skill programmes and music therapy. Patients can also request further support from Alcoholics Anonymous.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health to outline the support available in (i) Maghaberry; (ii) Magilligan; and (iii) Hydebank Wood to prisoners with drug and alcohol addictions.
(AQW 1192/17-22)

Mr Swann: All people who come in to prison are offered emotional support by the Prison Healthcare team and are seen by nursing staff several times in the first week of arrival. Additional support is provided as required from that point onwards.

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Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many outpatient clinics were cancelled in each of the last two financial years. (AQW 1198/17-22)

Mr Swann: This information is not collected centrally by the Department or by HSC Trusts.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many (i) pre-registration; and (ii) 18-month conversion midwifery training places have been (a) commissioned; and (b) filled in each of the last five years. (AQW 1199/17-22)

Mr Swann: The number of training places commissioned on these midwifery courses over the last five years is set out in the table below:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Pre-registration (undergraduate) midwifery	39	35	45	60	90
18-month conversion (graduate-entry) midwifery	25	20	20	30	30

All of these training places were filled.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many people have graduated from (i) pre-registration; and (ii) 18-month conversion midwifery training courses in each of the last five years. (AQW 1201/17-22)

Mr Swann: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Midwifery Graduates

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Pre-registration midwifery	32	30	33	34	32
18-month conversion midwifery	20	20	24	27	18

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health when people affected by contaminated blood will receive payments; and whether the payments will be tiered. (AQW 1215/17-22)

Mr Swann: The NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme was announced on 22 December 2016: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/michelle-oneill-announces-improved-financial-support-people-affected-by-contaminated-blood>.

The scheme is administered by the Business Services Organisation on behalf of the Department of Health NI. The financial support currently available is set out on the BSO website at: <http://www.hsrbusiness.hscni.net/services/2876.htm>

The payments are tiered depending on which category beneficiaries fall into i.e. Hepatitis C stage 1, Hepatitis C stage 2, HIV, Co-Infected HIV & Hepatitis C Stage 1 or Co-Infected HIV & Hepatitis C Stage 2.

Following the January monitoring round, I announced further interim payments ranging from £4,000 to £8,000 per person for people who were diagnosed with Hepatitis C or HIV after receiving NHS-supplied infected blood. These payments will be

processed in the coming weeks. I hope to announce further support before the end of this financial year, informed by a wider ongoing review of overall provision.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how many people are currently on a waiting list for IVF treatment.
(AQW 1216/17-22)

Mr Swann: As at 31st December 2019, the latest quarter for which information is available, there were 310 patients on a waiting list for IVF treatment.

This information has been provided by the Regional Fertility Centre.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health for an update on proposals to provide a regional short break and respite facility for young people with complex needs.
(AQW 1220/17-22)

Mr Swann: I refer the Member to my response for Priority Written AQW 1082/17-22.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage, of current staff vacancy rates of Allied Health Professionals in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 1225/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of Allied Health Professional (AHP) vacancies actively being recruited to and AHP vacancy rates in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust at 30th September 2019, is detailed in the table below:

HSC Trust	AHP Vacancies	AHP Vacancy Rate (%)
Belfast	182	11.0%
Northern	65	6.6%
South Eastern	68	8.2%
Southern	123	11.5%
Western	123	14.6%
NI Ambulance Service ¹	40	8.8%
Regional organisations	4	36.4%
Total	605	10.4%

Source: Recruitment & Selection Shared Services (BSO)

¹ Includes Paramedics who became formally recognised as an AHP in 2018. Information on the number of vacancies actively being recruited to in HSC is published on a quarterly basis at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/staff-vacancies>.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Health whether there are plans to address the lack of parking at Craigavon Area Hospital.
(AQW 1230/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has created an additional 100 spaces over the last 12 months at Craigavon Area Hospital. Currently, due to capacity constraints on site, any further increase would require significant investment.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Health what progress has been made on the implementation of the Protect Life 2 - Suicide Prevention Strategy.
(AQW 1231/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Protect Life 2 Strategy was published on 10 September 2019 and sets out a clear action plan for addressing suicide. Implementation of the Strategy commenced proactively with the launch of three additional programmes through supplementary transformation programme funding: The Multi Agency Triage Team, Regional Towards Zero Suicide Mental Health Collaborative Programme and Crisis De-escalation initiatives.

A wide range of services are currently provided including: Lifeline 24/7 helpline, self-harm support, training, counselling support, resilience building, awareness raising campaigns and bereavement support.

As part of the Budget 2020/21 process the Department has submitted bids to the Department of Finance to secure additional funding to support the implementation of this Strategy.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health why £1m of Confidence and Supply Transformation money has been reclassified from Resource to Capital in the January Monitoring Round; and for what purpose will the money be used.

(AQW 1260/17-22)

Mr Swann: As part of our normal financial monitoring arrangements, some slippage in planned spend was identified across Transformation projects.

£1m of this funding, initially allocated as resource spend was reclassified to capital for allocation to the Encompass Programme. Encompass is a key enabler for transformation, delivering an integrated electronic health and care record solution to support better outcomes for patients.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health for an update on the support for children and young people who are in care, or who are looked after, when they reach 18 years old and leave a care setting to live on their own.

(AQW 1262/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 places a statutory duty on Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to prepare looked after children for leaving care and to provide services to them when they have left care in order to improve their life prospects as they make the transition to independent living.

HSC Trusts must assess and meet young people's individual needs up to the age of 21, and up to age 24 if they are still in education or training.

The services and support currently available to care leavers include allocating a Personal Adviser, conducting a needs assessment, producing a pathway plan, which should be regularly reviewed, keeping in contact or re-establishing contact with the young person and providing maintenance and suitable accommodation. These supports enable care leavers to eventually live on their own.

In 2017, as part of a public consultation on the draft Adoption and Children Bill, the Department sought views on whether to extend some support to care leavers up to age 25. Responses have been analysed and work to finalise the Bill is almost complete.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, given the increase in the number of people lost through drug-related deaths, whether he has any plans to increase the funding for support services and interventions at the point of need.

(AQW 1263/17-22)

Mr Swann: Each and every drug-related death is preventable and it is a key priority for me and my Department – working with the Health & Social Care sector, the Department of Justice, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and others – to address this growing issue.

My Department has begun the development of a new substance misuse strategy and this was reflected in “New Decade, New Approach”. I plan to ensure this new strategy is designed with input from all key stakeholders, including service users, to ensure that we improve treatment and support services, and take innovative and effective action to reduce alcohol and drug related harm. At the same time, a review of the regional alcohol and drug services commissioning framework is underway. This will look at the services we currently commission in Northern Ireland and what is required to meet best practice and local need.

Through both these developments, I will consider the need for further investment in the new strategy and the commissioning framework. We also need to ensure the resources currently invested in addressing this issue are being used as effectively as possible, in line with the evidence.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health for an update on the business case for medical workforce planning for the graduate-entry medical school at Ulster University's Magee campus.

(AQW 1270/17-22)

Mr Swann: Work continues on an Outline Business Case to expand the number of medical student places as recommended in the Medical Student Places Review. Value for money, deliverability, ability to address our health-related policy objectives and long term affordability are central considerations for my Department. I look forward to working with Ministerial colleagues across the NI Executive on this issue as envisaged in “New Decade, New Approach”.

Mr Harvey asked the Minister of Health what steps are being taken to reduce the waiting lists for asthma sufferers referred for monoclonal antibody therapy.

(AQW 1275/17-22)

Mr Swann: New measures have been initiated by Belfast Trust to help address the waiting lists for monoclonal antibody therapy. These include the development of a homecare service to free up new outpatient capacity and the utilisation of remote monitoring technology to fast track patients into the service.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health what plans the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has for the Lisburn Health Centre building, following the opening of the new Primary and Community Care facility on the Lagan Valley hospital site.

(AQW 1290/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Lisburn Primary and Community Care business case identified the Lisburn Health Centre building for disposal. However, due to continuous pressure for clinical accommodation on acute sites, the South Eastern HSC Trust is reviewing the potential need to retain this building. Any such proposal will need to be assessed alongside alternative options via a business case to ensure that the option selected delivers Value for Money.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health what financial support his Department makes available for suicide and mental health awareness in each council area.

(AQW 1291/17-22)

Mr Swann: This information is not available by Council area. Financial support provided by the Department of Health and allocated by the Public Health Agency is broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area as outlined below with the exception of the Lifeline Helpline which is a regional service. Two projects were also funded from the Transformation Fund.

Expenditure at Health Trust Level

Mental Health Promotion	2018/2019
Belfast	£167,392
South East	£129,684
North	£161,719
South	£140,988
West	£119,220
Regional	£22,531
Total	£741,534

Suicide Prevention	2018/2019
Belfast	£1,576,051
South East	£581,303
North	£939,657
South	£649,566
West	£1,720,704
Regional	£56,586
Total	£5,523,867

Lifeline Helpline Expenditure

2018/2019
£2,507,673

Transformation Fund Expenditure

		2018/19
Suicide Prevention Crisis De-escalation Pilot / Street Triage Pilot	Belfast	£69,036
Suicide Prevention Crisis De-escalation Pilot / Street Triage Pilot	South East	£156,974

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health to provide a detailed breakdown of the staffing complement and services offered on the St Luke's Hospital site, which contains the Mullinure and Longstone hospital facilities in Armagh City.

(AQW 1297/17-22)

Mr Swann:

Directorate	Headcount	WTE	Summary of Services Offered
Acute Services	29	22.63	Support Services, Community Midwifery and Health Records.

Directorate	Headcount	WTE	Summary of Services Offered
Children & Young People's Services	178	154.74	RISE NI, Social Services Workforce Development & Training Team, CAMHS, Autism Services, School Nursing and Records, Community Dental, Paediatric AHP Services, Rapid Response Team, Children with Disability Services and Family Nurse Partnership
Executive Directorate of Nursing & Midwifery and AHP's	13	10.78	MAPA Training, Practice Development and AHP Governance & Workforce Planning
Finance & Procurement	32	30.60	Estates Services and Procurement
HR & Organisational Development	100	86.96	Human Resources and Organisational Development Services
Mental Health & Disability Services	312	275.00	Transport Services, Psychology, Adult Protection, Mental Health Services including Addictions, Eating Disorders Services, Memory Services, Recovery & Support, Community Rehabilitation, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Learning Disability Services including Crisis Response, Adult Transitions Service and Complex Care Team, Behaviour Support and Physical and Sensory Disability Teams
Older People & Primary Care*	190	155.43	Domiciliary Care, Intermediate Care Teams, Mullinure Day Unit, Promoting Wellbeing Services, Community Stroke and Respiratory Teams, Access & Information, Reablement.
Performance & Reform	2	2.00	Information Governance
Overall Total	856	738.14	

WTE= Whole Time Equivalents

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health for his assessment on how many additional local GPs will be employed following the establishment of a medical school in Derry.

(AQW 1315/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is not possible to make such an assessment at this time, whilst the business cases process continues. I look forward to working with my Executive colleagues on this issue as envisaged in "New Decade, New Approach".

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health (i) for his assessment of how Brexit will impact Health staff numbers; and (ii) to detail the number of envisaged vacant posts as a result.

(AQW 1319/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is not possible to provide a definitive assessment at this time, either of the impact on health and social care staff numbers, or on the potential for vacancies as a result.

The European Union Withdrawal Agreement confirms the position with regard to citizens' rights, including for those working within health and social care, with the intention to provide confidence and stability for those who have already made Northern Ireland their home and for those who wish to do so before the end of the implementation period.

The end of free movement after 31 December 2020 will have an impact on the ability of European citizens, apart from Irish citizens, to move to Northern Ireland to live and work. How this will impact on health and social care staff numbers will depend upon the outcome of negotiations between the United Kingdom Government and the European Union and upon the new immigration system that the United Kingdom Government puts in place of free movement.

The United Kingdom Government commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to carry out an in-depth analysis of potential future salary thresholds and an 'Australian' style points system. The MAC published its report, A Points-Based System and Salary Thresholds for Immigration, on 28 January 2020. It sets out 28 recommendations which the MAC expects would reduce pressure on health services.

The full report can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migration-advisory-committee-mac-report-points-based-system-and-salary-thresholds>

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health what policy his Department will pursue regarding the use of European Health Insurance Cards after Northern Ireland leaves the EU.

(AQW 1320/17-22)

Mr Swann: European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) are part of the reciprocal healthcare provision under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems (Regulation 883). This regulation will continue to apply to the United Kingdom (UK) until the end of the implementation period on 31 December 2020. There are provisions in the European Union Withdrawal Agreement that will maintain the right to use an EHIC over the transition period and for those who may have retained citizens' rights.

At the end of the implementation period Regulation 883 will no longer apply to the UK unless the UK comes to an agreement with the European Union on this matter. I will work with my colleagues across the UK to ensure that any future arrangements take account of the needs of Northern Ireland.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Health how his Department will improve waiting times for patients in the Western Health and Social Care Trust with a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy referral.
(AQW 1340/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has experienced significant increase in demand for cognitive behavioural therapy services. Using available resources the Trust is providing additional appointments on evenings and weekends to reduce waiting times.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 812/17-22, what constitutes an unusual or unexpected delay in the issuing of death certificates; and whether he will meet with me, funeral directors and the families affected.
(AQW 1344/17-22)

Mr Swann: There is no statutory definition of an unusual or unexpected delay. The legal process for death certification and registration is prescribed in the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

If a doctor has treated the deceased within 28 days and knows the cause of death they should complete the death certificate forthwith and give it to the qualified informant who must register the death within 5 days. However, if the doctor is unavailable at the time of death or the death needs reported to the coroner there may be a slight delay in issuing the certificate and releasing the body.

I do not believe a meeting is needed at this time, however I would be happy to review the position should you have further information you wish to share with my office.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) timeline of the procedures put in place to address the blood contamination scandal; (ii) allocation of the sum received through in-year monitoring; (iii) services for victims of contaminated blood; and (iv) role that service users played in co-producing existing services.
(AQW 1345/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Infected Blood Inquiry, chaired by Sir Brian Langstaff, was announced in July 2017 and is examining why men, women and children in the UK were given infected blood and/or infected blood products; the impact on their families; how the authorities (including government) responded; the nature of any support provided following infection; questions of consent; and whether there was a cover-up. Oral evidence sessions have been held across the UK, the latest taking place in London in November 2019. The next stage will be evidence from expert witnesses, due to start on 24th February 2020. The Inquiry is expected to hear from decision makers including clinicians and government organisations in summer 2020. There is more information available on the Infected Blood Inquiry website at: www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/.

My Department received £1.03m from the Department of Finance as a result of the January monitoring round and I used this allocation to make interim payments of between £4,000 and £8,000 to all infected beneficiaries on the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme. This amounts to around 60% of the total allocation and is intended as an immediate payment to go some way toward addressing financial hardship while I give careful consideration on how best to allocate the remaining funding before the end of this financial year. These interim additional payments are the beginning of a three-stage review process, the first phase of which has already commenced and will inform the provision of further support.

The second phase of the review will address other aspects of the scheme, with a view to working towards greater parity of support across the UK schemes, taking account of local circumstances and beneficiaries' needs in Northern Ireland. Further reform of the scheme will be required to address recommendations from the UK-wide Infected Blood Inquiry, chaired by Sir Brian Langstaff. It is due to deliver its report in 2021. Any significant changes to the scheme in future are likely to require consultation with beneficiaries and other key stakeholders

Those who received contaminated blood and/or blood products as treatment for Haemophilia receive ongoing clinical care in the Adult Haemophilia Comprehensive Care Centre based in Belfast City Hospital with outreach services at Altnagelvin Area Hospital. Others have received clinical care and treatment for Hepatitis C in the Regional Hepatology Service based in the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast. Patients and families affected by the Infected Blood Inquiry issues at present are able to access the services of a psychologist. It is intended that this service continue in the Centre once the Inquiry is over, and it will be important to consider ways in which this work can become embedded in the service in future.

The UK Haemophilia Centres Doctors' Organisation (UKHCDO/QRS) Review of the Haemophilia Comprehensive Care Centre undertaken in October 2019 noted, "There is active patient and public involvement, with a formal survey, 'What matters to you', having been undertaken, and the team host a number of extra-curricular activities and events. Patients' feedback

about the care they received was very positive, and they commented on the careful attention also given to families and carers.”

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health how many (i) admissions to; and (ii) discharges from, Muckamore Abbey hospital have occurred in each month since 2016.

(AQW 1349/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of (i) admissions to; and (ii) discharges from, Muckamore Abbey Hospital each month since 2016 is presented in the tables below.

Number of patients admitted to Muckamore Abbey Hospital by month (2016 – 2019)

Month	Year			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	11	9	10	0
February	8	9	5	3
March	9	7	7	0
April	7	9	9	5
May	9	10	9	1
June	11	5	9	0
July	11	10	5	1
August	5	10	2	0
September	9	12	4	0
October	8	9	3	1
November	7	8	0	0
December	7	11	0	1
Total	102	109	63	12

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Number of patients discharged from Muckamore Abbey Hospital by month (2016 – 2019)

Month	Year			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	13	9	10	4
February	10	7	4	3
March	7	8	9	3
April	7	6	10	1
May	11	11	10	0
June	12	11	5	2
July	3	8	8	4
August	9	13	9	5
September	8	13	8	3
October	16	14	2	3
November	8	7	1	0
December	8	11	3	0
Total	112	118	79	28

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health whether he will undertake a demand analysis for community mental health services, to provide an accurate reflect of need.

(AQW 1351/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am committed to publishing a Mental Health Strategy by the end of the year. A range of evidence will be gathered to inform the strategy and gaps in evidence will be identified. A range of stakeholders will be involved in co-producing the strategy and I will listen carefully to suggestions to address any gaps in evidence.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health what plans are being put in place to improve the number of doctors on duty on each shift, and based at, Newtownards Hospital to provide the North Down and Ards GP Out of Hours Service.

(AQW 1357/17-22)

Mr Swann: A shortage of GPs affects both daytime general practice and out of hours, a number of actions are being taken:

The annual intake into the GP training programme has been significantly expanded from 65 places available in 2015 to 111 places from 2019, an increase of more than 70%.

The GP Induction and Refresher Scheme supports GPs to safely return to general practice following a career break or time spent working abroad. It also supports the safe introduction of overseas GPs.

A GP Retainer Scheme was introduced June 2018 and is designed to assist with the retention of GPs in primary care in Northern Ireland.

A range of actions are being taken to address the specific challenges of GP shortages being faced in Out of Hours by providers across the province.

In North Down and Ards GP OOHs service new ways of working have been introduced, including adding Nurse Practitioners to assess and treat patients and paramedics to carry out home visits.

Service improvements continue to be introduced including adjusting the skill mix of clinicians, increasing levels of nurse triage provision, employing more nurse practitioners and increasing flexibility in shift times. Work is also underway to develop a regional approach to the delivery of the service.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health whether a care pathway exists for people who present with problem gambling issues; and, if not, whether the Department has any plans to develop such a pathway.

(AQW 1409/17-22)

Mr Swann: There is no specific care pathway for those seeking assistance for gambling addictions in Northern Ireland.

Where problem gambling causes mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, appropriate help and support is provided in line with clinical need and current service provision for mental health. This include general Community Addictions teams within each Trust area which provide general assistance for those who suffer from all addictions. Further support is also available in the community and voluntary sector.

There are currently no plans to develop a pathway specifically for people with gambling problems.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Health whether patients on waiting lists can avail of opportunities for earlier treatment in hospitals in the Republic of Ireland; and, if so, who pays for this treatment.

(AQW 1416/17-22)

Mr Swann: Directive 2011/24/EU on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare (CBHD) allows patients to seek treatment, which is the same as or equivalent to treatment that would be made available to the patient in their state of residence, in an EEA country, and to have the costs of that treatment reimbursed on their return to their home State. In NI the patient will pay for the treatment themselves and be reimbursed on their return. The amount reimbursed will be the actual cost of treatment or the equivalent cost had treatment been provided by the home State, whichever is less.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Health to detail the makeup of the working group on mental wellbeing and resilience and how many members will be occupational therapists.

(AQW 1448/17-22)

Mr Swann: I have written to Executive Committee colleagues seeking an early meeting of the Executive Working Group on Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention.

The remit, terms of reference and constitution of the group will be discussed at the first meeting.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health to outline the status of the business case for a perinatal mental health inpatient unit and community services.

(AQW 1453/17-22)

Mr Swann: A Business case for Perinatal Mental Health has been developed and officials from my Department are working alongside officials from the PHA to revise the case and consider the detail of the proposals. Once the business case,

or business cases, have been completed any need for additional funding will be considered alongside other competing budgetary pressures and in the context of the Department's financial settlement.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health to detail any overseas nursing recruitment exercises that have been conducted in the last five years; and the results of these exercises.

(AQW 1460/17-22)

Mr Swann: The current International Nursing Recruitment project commenced in January 2016 as one approach to address the escalating Registered Nurse (Adult) vacancies across the five Health and Social Care Trusts. The project aim is to recruit 622 nurses to the HSC by March 2020.

As of 31 January 2020 the HSC had 420 arrivals from EU and non-EU countries. Of these 374 remain in post, with 33 resignations and 13 terminations. Recent numbers have been increasing, and current trends indicate that the target of 622 will be reached – and perhaps exceeded - within the coming months.

My officials are currently developing options for my consideration for future international recruitment exercises, which could complement the increase in pre-registration nursing and midwifery places outlined in New Decade, New Approach, as a further means of filling nursing vacancies. There is also a need to promote Health and Social Care as an employer of choice, and a number of actions are being progressed under the health and social care Workforce Strategy.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health to outline his next steps on the implementation of the reconfiguration of stroke services.

(AQW 1495/17-22)

Mr Swann: The public consultation on 'Reshaping Stroke Care – Saving Lives, Reducing Disability' closed on 30 August 2019, with 19,510 responses received.

My officials have now completed the consultation analysis. Once I have carefully considered all of the evidence presented to me, I intend to announce my decisions on the way forward. I will publish the consultation analysis report at that point. I will, of course, update the House in due course.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health when he will publish his Department's consultation report on Reshaping Stroke Care.

(AQW 1496/17-22)

Mr Swann: The public consultation on 'Reshaping Stroke Care – Saving Lives, Reducing Disability' closed on 30 August 2019, with 19,510 responses received.

My officials have now completed the consultation analysis. Once I have carefully considered all of the evidence presented to me, I intend to announce my decisions on the way forward. I will publish the consultation analysis report at that point. I will, of course, update the House in due course.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health for an update on (i) support for children and young people who are in care and/or being looked after; (ii) what happens to them when they reach eighteen and leave a care setting to live on their own.

(AQW 1502/17-22)

Mr Swann: When a child or young person is 'looked after' by a Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, the HSC Trust becomes their 'Corporate Parent' and is responsible for safeguarding the child and promoting his or her welfare.

HSC Trusts, supported by other public authorities and third sector partners, provide an extensive range of supports to looked after children and young people, which seek to deliver improved outcomes in key areas of their lives, including their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing and educational attainment. Support is provided to ensure each young person has: an appropriate and safe place to live; access to education, training or employment; their healthcare needs assessed and met; an effective care plan in place, which is regularly reviewed; and advocacy support.

Work is underway to finalise a new strategy specific to looked after children and care-experienced young people. The strategy, A Life Deserved: "Caring" for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, was taken forward jointly by the Departments of Health and Education and will be supported in implementation by other departments.

In relation to Part (ii) of the question, I refer you to the response issued in respect of AQW 1262/17-22 and AQW 1503/17-22.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health what happens to looked after children or children in care when they reach 18 years and leave a care setting to live on their own.

(AQW 1503/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 places a statutory duty on Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to prepare looked after children for leaving care and to provide services to them when they have left care in order to improve their life prospects as they make the transition to independent living.

HSC Trusts must assess and meet young people's individual needs up to the age of 21, and up to age 24 if they are still in education or training.

The services and support currently available to care leavers include allocating a Personal Adviser, conducting a needs assessment, producing a pathway plan, which should be regularly reviewed, keeping in contact or re-establishing contact with the young person and providing maintenance and suitable accommodation. These supports enable care leavers to eventually live on their own.

In 2017, as part of a public consultation on the draft Adoption and Children Bill, the Department sought views on whether to extend some support to care leavers up to age 25. Responses have been analysed and work to finalise the Bill is almost complete.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Health what steps he is taking to minimise service disruption to patients, particularly those with mobility issues, while access improvement works take place at Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex.
(AQW 1521/17-22)

Mr Swann: Western Trust is adopting a number of measures to minimise disruption during these works, including additional directional signage, additional staff to assist visitors, a temporary set-down area located within the existing disabled car park, additional temporary free disabled car parking spaces and the Translink bus stop has been temporarily relocated closer to the 24 hour entrance to the hospital.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health which directorate leads on dementia diagnosis and care within each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 1523/17-22)

Mr Swann: The following Directorates lead on dementia diagnosis and care within each Health and Social Care Trust:

- Belfast Trust - Adult Social & Primary Care Services
- Northern Trust - Mental Health, Learning Disability and Community Wellbeing Directorate
- Southern Trust - Mental Health & Disability Directorate
- South Eastern Trust - Primary Care, Older People & Nursing Directorate
- Western Trust - Primary Care and Older People's Services Directorate

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Health what actions he has taken to address the respite care waiting lists in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 1527/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are no waiting lists for the delivery of respite care/short breaks within the Western Trust.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health to detail the average waiting time for a non-urgent GP appointment.
(AQW 1541/17-22)

Mr Swann: This information is not available. As independent contractors, GP practices are responsible for managing their own appointment systems and waiting times.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health why the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is not following recognised best practice in public consultations by holding a two week public consultation, instead of an eight week public consultation, into proposed car parking changes at Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital.
(AQW 1564/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust have advised me that they follow the Equality Commission guidance as set out in the Trust's approved Equality Scheme.

In 2009 and prior to the introduction of car parking charges at Craigavon and Daisyhill Hospitals, the Trust undertook a full Equality Impact Assessment and associated public consultation to take the views of patients, visitors and staff on the proposed charging regime.

As the current revision to parking charges were deemed not to be a major or contentious issue the Trust decided that a full Equality Impact Assessment and public consultation was not required.

In keeping with the Trust's equality scheme and the Department's car parking policy, the Trust have carried out an equality screening which has deemed the impact of the revised changes to be minor. Subsequently a decision was taken at a senior level within the Trust to conduct a local two week consultation on proposed adjustments to the parking charges.

This is similar to the action taken in 2015 when adjustments were made to the original car parking charges.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health to outline the mental health provision to support the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

(AQW 1567/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) duty of care for all employees is articulated in its Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

Support services available to NIFRS employees in mental health include: Independent counselling services, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), an external Occupational Health Practitioner, trained mental health first aiders, awareness campaigns and signposting of mental health charities and support services and assigned health and well-being advocates. Provision for the mental health and well-being of employees is also covered within some NIFRS operational training and policies e.g. Critical Incident Stress Management Policy.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what steps have been taken towards a pilot supervised injecting facility, as part of a strategy on preventing suicide and drug-related deaths.

(AQW 1587/17-22)

Mr Swann: Supervised Injecting Facilities are not currently legal under the UK-wide Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, therefore no steps have been taken towards piloting such a facility in Northern Ireland. I am aware of discussions around this issue in both Scotland and the Republic of Ireland and I will watch developments closely.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what steps he is taking in response to the Still Waiting report by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, with particular regard to the development of pathways for young people to access mental health support and services.

(AQW 1588/17-22)

Mr Swann: On 10th October 2019 my Department published a draft Inter-Departmental Action Plan in response to the agreed recommendations of the 'Still Waiting' report. The Action Plan contains a series of actions to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) such as full implementation of the CAMHS Integrated Care Pathway 'Working Together: A Pathway for Children and Young People through CAMHS', which has been published since March 2018. A Progress Update Report on the draft Action Plan, outlining the key areas of progress since October, is available on my Department's website.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health (i) to outline the scale of the problems reported in respect of Essure coils; (ii) what help is available for people suffering adverse effects; (iii) whether use of Essure coils has been discontinued; and (iv) if so, when and for what reasons.

(AQW 1596/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Department does not hold centrally information related to the number of women here that are experiencing complications related to the Essure device. The Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre however has received 8 reports, via the Medicines and Health Care products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), from patients residing in Northern Ireland who have reported complications with this device.

As with other conditions the health and social care sector will provide the necessary care needed and any patient who experiences complications following surgery is advised to contact their GP and their implanting surgeon for assessment and treatment.

The Essure device is no longer in use as, following suspension of the devices CE mark in August 2017, the manufacturer permanently withdrew the device from the EU market on commercial grounds. The suspension of the devices CE mark was not related to safety or quality issues.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health how many inpatient beds are there in Belfast for medical support for drugs and alcohol addiction.

(AQW 1597/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are currently no beds within Belfast for individuals requiring medical support for drug and alcohol addiction. However Belfast Trust can access inpatient beds in Ward 15 in Downshire Hospital and Carrick 1 within Holywell Hospital.

The Belfast Trust commissions 6 beds within Carlisle House which offer residential facilities for individuals who require additional rehabilitation support.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health to detail why the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service put emergency '999' callers on hold and transfer them to their counterparts in Scotland or the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1624/17-22)

Mr Swann: All 999 calls are initially answered by the public emergency call service operated by British Telecommunications plc (BT). If there are issues such as an unplanned volume of calls, or an unplanned disruption to any UK ambulance service's 999 call handling services, standard contingency arrangements are in place to electronically transfer calls to another ambulance service with which they have a 'buddy' arrangement.

NIAS have a reciprocal 'buddy' arrangement with the Scottish Ambulance Service. This enables ambulance dispatch without undue delay, while still providing appropriate clinical advice to callers in managing their condition such as giving CPR instructions or advice on the control of bleeding. This means that calls are handled appropriately until normal 999 call handling services are restored.

There is no official 'buddy' arrangement with the National Ambulance Service in the Republic of Ireland. However, as a result of mobile roaming, 999 calls made via mobile phones along the border regions frequently means that NIAS Emergency Ambulance Control will take calls for locations in ROI and vice versa. These call details are transferred by priority telephone lines between NIAS and the National Ambulance Service.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health whether he plans to convert the Independent Neurology Inquiry into a full public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005.

(AQW 1671/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Independent Neurology Inquiry was established by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health in May 2018 as a non-statutory inquiry. Its work forms part of a series of actions in response to the recall of neurology patients by the Belfast Trust. The Inquiry is independent of all other organisations.

I have met with the Inquiry Panel and am assured that they have made significant progress. They are at a critical stage in the delivery of their Terms of Reference and on this basis I have no plans to change their status.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health when he will finalise his Department's e-Safety strategy, which was consulted on in 2019.

(AQW 1721/17-22)

Mr Swann: The draft strategy, now known as an On-line Safety strategy, and accompanying action plan are being finalised and, subject to necessary approvals, including Executive agreement, will be published soon.

In January 2015, the former Executive commissioned the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to develop the strategy and action plan. As sponsor department of the SBNI, development has been led by my Department.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health to outline his plans to address the abuse of (i) illegal drugs; and (ii) prescription drugs in East Belfast.

(AQW 1767/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, the Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency work in partnership to address the issues of alcohol and drug misuse within the Belfast Trust Area. These partners are involved locally in the Belfast Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Team (BDACT) along with community, voluntary and statutory organizations, including the PSNI. BDACT works to co-ordinate, develop and deliver drug and alcohol related initiatives across the whole of the Belfast Trust area using a partnership approach. This includes initiatives to tackle the misuse of illicit drugs and prescription medicines.

BDACT oversees the implementation of the local Drug and Alcohol Incident Protocol. This protocol enables organisations to work together in a co-ordinated way to provide a prompt and appropriate response to serious drug or alcohol incidents and emerging issues of concern. This is achieved through ensuring community intelligence about serious drug or alcohol incidents is shared in a prompt and appropriate manner and formally links with the regional Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System. This protocol also provides for co-ordination for relevant agencies to support local communities in responding to local concerns.

In addition, a range of services focused on meeting the drug and alcohol needs of children, young people, adults and families / carers are available in each Health and Social Care Trust area across Northern Ireland. These services address all areas of substance misuse, including illicit drugs and prescription medicines.

Regionally a number of reviews are being undertaken with regard to the commissioning of Alcohol and Drugs Services, including Opioid Substitute Treatment Services, along with work to develop a successor strategy to the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Health how he plans to address the difficulties in recruiting domiciliary carers to put in place adequate care packages for those requiring support.

(AQO 91/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department is currently looking at those recommendations from the Power to People Report which will impact on future domiciliary care provision.

An action plan is being developed in response to these recommendations which will include consideration of sustainable system building, the social care market place and equalising pay and conditions for the workforce.

Along with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, my officials are developing a campaign to highlight the value of the social care workforce, including domiciliary care, and to improve recruitment.

We are working to put in place a values based recruitment process. Through transformation funding, significant training has already been delivered to the workforce and work is progressing on improving recruitment.

My Department will support staff who work within domiciliary care services to enable recognition of the unique contribution they provide to the social wellbeing of the population.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health how he will work with the Minister of Justice to reduce the time police spend in hospitals and medical facilities supervising vulnerable people.

(AQO 89/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are already a number of areas where collaborative working between my Department and the Department of Justice is helping the PSNI to reduce the time that police officers spend supervising vulnerable people.

Last June, both departments jointly published the Improving Health within Criminal Justice Strategy which, in part, aims to better align resources, enhance access to relevant health services and improve collaborative working.

One such project is the Custody Healthcare Pathfinder at Musgrave Street Police station where a nurse-led healthcare model has been in place since October 2018. This 24/7 embedded healthcare service has replaced the previous Forensic Medical Officer model where Out of Hours GPs provided care on an on-call basis.

Early indications suggest that the pathfinder has provided substantial benefits for the PSNI, in particular a reduction in the amount of time PSNI officers are spending in the transportation and supervision of detainees in Emergency Departments. A business case is currently being completed which will inform the PSNI approach to the future of custody healthcare throughout Northern Ireland.

My Department has also worked collaboratively with the Department of Justice in implementing the Multi Agency Triage Team, or MATT for short. This is a project which involves two Police Officers, a Community Mental Health Practitioner and a paramedic working together to respond to people with mental health issues who have accessed the 999 system.

The project commenced in July 2018 in the South Eastern Trust area and in August 2019 was extended to the Belfast Trust area. This approach of providing a rapid response in the community instead of waiting for the person in distress to present at an Emergency Department is delivering very positive outcomes, and also reduces the need for PSNI officers to spend time waiting with distressed service users in Emergency Departments.

I look forward to working with the Minister for Justice to take these important collaborative projects forward.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of the commitment to providing couples with three free rounds of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) as outlined in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQO 93/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am pleased that the New Decade, New Approach Agreement committed to providing three funded IVF cycles for eligible women.

However, the Regional Fertility Centre does not currently have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for treatment arising from offering three cycles of IVF to all eligible women, as there are not enough trained staff to carry out the procedures, nor is there enough space at the premises to facilitate a higher number of patients.

I am exploring how to achieve the implementation of this commitment. At this stage, therefore, I am unable to give a definitive implementation date.

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Health whether his department has contacted the Coroner to ascertain the number of alcohol and drug overdose related deaths, particularly associated with suicide, within the last 12 months.

(AQO 94/17-22)

Mr Swann: Official Statistics on alcohol-specific or drug-related deaths are published by the General Register Office for Northern Ireland (GRONI), which is located within the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA).

You may wish to note that a representative from the Coroner's Office sits on the steering group which oversees our alcohol and drug strategy, and also on the Protect Life 2 Strategy Implementation Steering Group for suicide prevention. The Coroners also meet with the Chief Medical Officer as required, and substance misuse related deaths and suicide deaths have been discussed at a strategic level in these meetings. Finally the Coroners can raise concerns directly with the Department when issues emerge – as has been the case previously in relation to the misuse of tramadol.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health to outline the measures his Department has considered to reduce the volume of prescription drugs that are not collected at, or returned unused to, local pharmacies.

(AQO 95/17-22)

Mr Swann: Medicines that are not collected by patients may be returned to stock but medicines returned to community pharmacies after being dispensed cannot be reused as the pharmacist cannot be satisfied as to the integrity and quality of the products.

For that reason the measures that my Department promote to reduce prescription drugs waste focus on the appropriate prescribing and ordering of medicines, especially repeat prescriptions and high cost areas such as nutritional products.

The Department's Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework sets out the strategic direction for improving and reforming medicine safety and effectiveness across health and social care in Northern Ireland. For example, prescribers are expected to make arrangements for patients on repeat medications to have checks carried out before prescriptions are issued. Last financial year, almost 30,000 patients in Northern Ireland had their medication reviewed in community pharmacies and received advice on how to use their medicine more effectively and reduce waste.

Other initiatives to reduce medicines waste include an ongoing focus on improving systems for the ordering and supply of nutritional products, particularly within residential homes. The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have also previously organised public awareness campaigns to highlight the extent of medicines wastage.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health how many inpatients are admitted to Muckamore Abbey Hospital.
(AQO 96/17-22)

Mr Swann: During the period 01 January 2019 – 31 December 2019 there were 12 admissions to Muckamore Abbey hospital.

5 of these admissions were new to Muckamore Abbey Hospital and 7 were re-admissions i.e. from patients who had previously been an in-patient at Muckamore and have now been re-admitted.

27 patients have also been discharged during this period.

As at 31 January 2020, there are 50 inpatients in Muckamore Abbey Hospital and 3 patients on trial resettlement.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Health for an update on the development of a mental health action plan.
(AQO 97/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am fully behind the commitment in the New Decade, New Approach document which commits to the production of a Mental Health Action Plan within 2 months.

Since the middle of 2018 officials in the Department of Health have together with a wide range of stakeholders been co-producing a Mental Health Action Plan. The aim has been to develop actions that has a real impact on positive delivery of mental health services.

The draft Action Plan currently consists of 51 actions falling in three broad categories.

The first category aims to provide fixes to immediate problems and immediate service developments – where there has been an identified immediate need. This includes, for example, consideration of alternative methods of working for the mental health workforce to respond to the immediate, and significant, workforce pressures.

The longer term strategic objectives aim to fulfil future strategic needs and include, for example, a multidisciplinary workforce review to consider mental health workforce needs and structures into the future.

The third category relates to preparatory work to inform future strategies. This includes, for example, development of an action plan for the use of technology and creating better governance structures.

Whilst some actions are of a preparatory nature, the plan also includes the creation of a Mental Health Strategy by the end of the year and the delivery of a number of reviews and service developments. These are subject to sufficient funding being provided to allow them to be taken forward.

My officials are currently working on finalising the action plan which I intend to publish in March.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's timeline for the completion of the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme.
(AQW 223/17-22)

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): Subject to the satisfactory and successful conclusion of all necessary statutory processes and the outcome of all necessary environmental assessments, the first phase of this Executive flagship project, from New Buildings to north of Strabane (Phase 1a) could commence in late 2020 / early 2021, with completion in 2023. The indicative programme for the whole scheme, as published in an addendum to the Environmental Statement of last year, indicated a phased approach to delivery, leading to scheme completion in 2028. While some slippage has occurred in this programme, it is considered that the overall completion date for the whole scheme of 2028 remains achievable. However, the commencement of construction and progression of each phase is clearly dependent on the successful completion of the above mentioned statutory processes and assessments, and the availability of funding over this period. I know this an important matter for members of the public. I am committed to addressing regional imbalance and enhancing opportunities to improve citizens lives.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on progress of the Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 305/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to advancing opportunities for communities through active travel. As one of my priorities, I want to work to enhance safer, cleaner travel that connects our communities and enhances lives.

The Department has been operating under severe budget constraints for some years and priority has had to be given to the delivery of the Executive flagship projects. Among the cycle and walking schemes that have been completed since 2016 are:

- Alfred Street and Upper Arthur Street segregated cycle lane;
- Durham Street, College Square North segregated cycle lane;
- College Street, Queen Street scheme;
- Middlepath Street scheme;
- Broadway Roundabout walking and cycling link to Bog Meadows;
- Comber Greenway improvements and widening.

Over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how best to deliver on my active and sustainable travel ambitions. Once the Budget process provides clarity on the resources available I will be able to firm up my objectives for cycling.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what funding will be made available for the A1 Junctions Phase 2 Project following its public inquiry.
(AQW 342/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Improving connectivity between Belfast and Dublin is a key priority for me, as is promoting road safety. I am also very aware just how important the proposed A1 improvements are for the many people who have expressed their support for the scheme, especially those who have lost loved ones.

I am therefore keen to advance improvements on this key strategic route as soon as possible following completion of the statutory processes but, until there is more clarity on the budgetary position, it is difficult to give a precise funding commitment.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what invest to save opportunities exist within her Department
(AQW 484/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have provided a list below of potential opportunities for Invest to Save that exist in my department, however you should be aware that the capital expenditure required to implement these projects cannot be afforded from the current budget allocation available to me.

Roads - Retro-fit non-LED luminaires with LED

this invest to save initiative reduces electricity consumption by replacing yellow sodium street lights with energy efficient LEDs.

NIW - Energy efficiency

by the development and sourcing of more energy efficiency solutions in the provisions of water and wastewater services and by maximising strategic aspects of energy contracts with better interaction with the external energy supplier market;

NIW - Renewable Generation

the application of renewable energy solutions from the supply market in terms of the installation of alternative power generation (e.g. solar farms, wind turbines), and also the implementation of energy contracts that are based on sourcing electricity from renewable sources; and

NIW - Energy storage

by using 'battery farms' to store renewable energy for use in terms of feeding the grid or recharging a future electric vehicle fleet. The funding would specifically be used for implementing a battery energy storage system as a means of gaining benefits while testing the viability of a more strategic solution.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure when her Department will update electronic bike regulations to bring Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.
(AQW 495/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Great Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence.

EAPCs have the potential to bring significant benefits to us all in terms of more physically active lifestyles, active travel, improved mental and physical health and wellbeing, social inclusion, tackling climate change, the strengthening of the local economy and tourism.

It is for these reasons that I have announced my intention to bring forward e-bike legislation in order to bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of these islands and Europe.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to carry out a feasibility study for a Derry to Sligo rail route. (AQW 538/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to improving all-island connectivity for the benefit of our economy and communities across Northern Ireland. New Decade New Approach identifies an ambitious agenda for North South connectivity and pursuing that in cooperation with the Irish Government within the resources available will be my priority. I will continue through the NSMC to explore how we advance and build on the ambitions of New Decade New Approach.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what policies her Department has in place to reduce transport accidents or RTCs, where the driver was under the influence of drugs; and (ii) what strategies will be implemented to combat this behaviour.

(AQW 553/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In Northern Ireland, it is currently an offence to drive (or be in charge of) a vehicle whilst impaired by drugs (whether through illegal drugs or through legal prescription drugs). PSNI assess fitness to drive by means of a roadside impairment test. Penalties are as severe as those for drink driving, in terms of fines, disqualifications and imprisonment.

I am concerned about the problem of drug driving in Northern Ireland and have asked officials to bring forward advice on the new approaches being taken across these islands. However I understand that while it is fairly straightforward to test for alcohol consumption and measure this against a legal limit – issues around drug testing can be more complex. For this reason, before I bring forward any new strategies to combat this behaviour I plan to consider the approaches that have been implemented in both Britain and Ireland in recent years, and see what we can learn.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she will reduce the waiting period between the approval for a disabled parking bay and its installation.

(AQW 624/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department recognises the importance of seeking to process applications as quickly as possible. A Statutory Rule is needed for the creation of a disabled parking bay. Once an application for a disabled parking bay has been approved, then the legislative process which is required by primary legislation and which includes a consultation must be undertaken. I have asked that my officials expedite all applications in as timely a manner as the legislation and process permits.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she has considered extending the residents-only parking scheme, piloted in the Holylands, to (i) Donegall Pass; (ii) Markets; (iii) Sandy Row; and (iv) Lower Ravenhill.

(AQW 724/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The first residents' parking scheme in Rugby Road / College Park Avenue, Belfast came into operation during April 2018. A review of the scheme, which reflects the needs, experiences and feedback of residents, is currently underway. I will want to make sure that any lessons learnt from this scheme inform wider policy on implementing residents' parking schemes.

I understand that a number of requests for residents' parking within the Belfast area have already been received by my Department. I can assure the Member that my officials are assessing these in the context of developing a new approach to residents' parking schemes that incorporates the learning from the first scheme.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the timeframe for the provision of a footbridge in Strabane to connect the bus station to the town centre.

(AQW 738/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the benefits of a footway/cycleway link between the town centre and the southern side of Strabane town including the bus station, and can confirm that my officials are actively engaging with Derry City and Strabane District Council to further develop the concept and design for the footbridge. Possible delivery options are also being explored, as is funding through the package of City Deal funding announced in 2019.

The heads of terms for the City Deal have yet to be finalised, so it is not possible to give an assurance that the bridge will be included and progressed within the growth deal package. I will consider carefully any progress should it be made.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the delivery of the Enniskillen Southern Bypass.

(AQW 777/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise that many in the local community support the provision of the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass. Unfortunately, I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints but I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland.

I will be assessing the pressures across my Department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in “New Decade: New Approach” and the budget made available for the period ahead. It is, therefore, too early to comment on the delivery of specific schemes.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail plans for a second footbridge in Strabane town.
(AQW 781/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the benefits of a footway/cycleway link between the town centre and the southern side of Strabane town including the bus station, and can confirm that my officials are actively engaging with Derry City and Strabane District Council to further develop the concept and design for the footbridge. Possible delivery options are also being explored, as is funding through the package of City Deal funding announced in 2019.

The heads of terms for the City Deal have yet to be finalised, so it is not possible to give an assurance that the bridge will be included and progressed within the growth deal package. I will consider carefully any progress should it be made.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure, with regard to the process for determining primary destinations on road signage, whether her Department will review this policy in relation to new signage erected along the dualling of the A6 Drumahoe to Dungiven.
(AQW 787/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The process for determining primary destinations is described in the national traffic sign design rules that have been devised to ensure that drivers can easily understand the message displayed. The rules ensure consistency of approach along a route to place names. I have asked officials for further information on previous consideration of this issue within the Department.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to provide a grace period for motorists with an expired MOT as a result of their scheduled MOT test being postponed.
(AQW 821/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current situation is not acceptable and I have instructed the DVA to work urgently to get a safe, sustainable and trusted service up and running as soon as and as safely as possible. All customers except taxis and those with four year old cars are being automatically issued an MOT exemption certificate which they can use to tax their vehicle and thereby continue to drive.

Taxis will not be issued with exemption certificates, as the relevant legislation does not provide for this. The Roadworthiness Directive requires that cars must have their first roadworthiness test when they are four years old, so they cannot be issued with MOT exemption certificates. Testing on heavy goods vehicles and buses is continuing and the heavy duty lanes are also being used to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers, for private customers and dealerships. I have also instructed officials to ensure extended opening hours are in place in order to minimise disruption to customers.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network. Their deployment has now been accelerated due to the current disruption. Three existing lifts have also been cleared by independent assessors for use and are now fully operational.

I have also instructed my Permanent Secretary to commission two separate reviews, which I will oversee. The first is an investigation of the timeline and events that led up to the situation that has arisen. I need greater assurance than I have at present about the maintenance and testing regime in operation and about the way in which initial concerns about the lifting equipment were followed up and addressed. I want to know the precise timeline and to understand who knew what and when and all actions taken. This review is being carried out independently by professional auditors managed from outside the Department.

I have also commissioned a second review which is being carried out by an external expert who will provide me with independent advice on the steps that need to be taken to return our MOT centres urgently to a position where a full testing service can be provided. I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the vehicle lifts in MOT Centres are subject to planned maintenance programmes that include periodic inspection and load testing.
(AQW 822/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The DVA takes health and safety very seriously to ensure both staff and customers are protected. As part of a regular preventative maintenance programme, there are minor inspections every eight weeks and major service inspections every six months of the DVA's equipment, including lifts, within its MOT centres. Following reports of cracks on MOT lifts, all lifts are currently subject to further independent assessment and inspections as an additional precaution.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on Exercise, Explore, Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways, which has shortlisted three projects for detailed study.

(AQW 829/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to enhancing citizens lives and connecting our communities through active travel. While I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints, I am looking carefully at solutions to help support the delivery of projects to meet my priorities of connecting our communities and enhancing our environment.

Over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how the provision of greenways can assist as part of my vision to enable greater sustainable transport options that connect communities and improve lives.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to introduce a ban on bullbars on non-agricultural vehicles.
(AQW 835/17-22)

Ms Mallon: From May 2007, European legislation has prohibited the fitting of frontal protection systems such as bull bars to new cars and goods vehicles not exceeding 3.5 tonnes, and have also prohibited the sale of such systems as after-market accessories for any age of vehicle.

The Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) is responsible for vehicle type approval and compliance with EC Directives and Regulations in GB and NI, and there are currently no plans to amend legislation in this area.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Ballynahinch bypass.
(AQW 836/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise that many in the local community support the provision of a bypass in Ballynahinch. Unfortunately, I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints but I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland.

I will be assessing the pressures across my department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in “New Decade: New Approach” and the budget made available for the period ahead. It is, therefore, too early to comment on specific schemes such as Ballynahinch By Pass.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of the passenger usage on the Glider service since its inception.
(AQW 837/17-22)

Ms Mallon: We have seen a significant increase in passenger usage on Glider and associated services since its inception in early September 2018, achieving over 13.6 million passenger journeys to date. This has been an increase in over 45,000 passenger journeys per week in comparison to the previous Metro services. This year so far, we have seen further growth of over 4,300 extra passenger journeys per week. The service has proven very popular with senior SmartPass holders and people with disabilities whose numbers continue to grow. For example, journeys taken by people with disabilities have increased from 49,730 in the first seven months of operation to March 2019, to 138,766 in the period from April 2019 to December 2019.

The success of Glider demonstrates that, with investment, we can provide a change in how we connect people within Northern Ireland and that we can attract people to these services. It is this type of initiative that will help us deliver positive outcomes for our citizens and will help in tackling the climate emergency.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure in light of the Department for Transport launching the veterans railcard initiative, whether she would consider a similar initiative.
(AQW 847/17-22)

Ms Mallon: It is unlikely that the introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland would offer further benefits beyond those already available. Translink currently offers a discount of 1/3 on all rail, Goldline and Ulsterbus services when purchasing tickets after 9.30 am. This provides a similar level of discount as that proposed for the veterans railway card in GB, but across a much wider range of services and is open to all fare paying passengers. In addition, under the current Concessionary Fares Scheme, Northern Ireland residents in receipt of War Disablement Pension or a Guaranteed Income Payment may apply for a NI War Disablement SmartPass, which allows the card holder free concessionary travel on Northern Ireland public transport services.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how her Department is supporting rural transport initiatives in West Tyrone.
(AQW 860/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Through Translink, my Department delivers an extensive public transport network which aims to connect people safely and enable access to social and economic opportunities across Northern Ireland. Additional rural transport services in the West Tyrone area are delivered by Easilink Community Transport which my Department funds through the Rural Transport Fund. These service plays a valuable role in connecting people, some of whom are the most vulnerable in our society, to opportunities including accessing essential local services and more actively participating in society.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) her Department has conducted any traffic surveys since 2018 along the B118 Woodvale Road; and (ii) the results have been published.

(AQW 866/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The B118 Woodvale Road linking the A6 Glenshane Road to Eglinton and beyond, has been the subject of traffic counts in the past. However, no further counts have been carried out since 2018.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will carry out a review of the criteria used to establish traffic calming measures.

(AQW 889/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. I believe that providing measures such as traffic calming can have a positive impact on improving road safety.

An early priority for me will be to review the Department's approach to road safety, with a particular focus on reducing speed limits. In that context, I will also consider the place of traffic calming measures and whether or not any change of approach is needed.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of the number of accidents on the road, to detail (i) any additional safety measures being considered in advance of A1 Junctions Phase 2 scheme; and (ii) timescales for implementation.

(AQW 902/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In advance of the main A1 Junctions Phase 2 road improvement scheme, approximately 6.5km of central reserve safety barrier has been installed along the A1 over the past few years. That scheme represents the best way forward in terms of further safety measures and I am keen to see it progress but precise timescales for implementation will depend on the outcome of the public inquiry and the wider budgetary context.

In the meantime, I can assure the member that my officials are continuing to explore opportunities and timescales for other safety measures on this route.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure how her Department will implement Government commitments contained in New Decade, New Approach in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge project.

(AQW 917/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In the New Decade, New Approach deal, the UK Government committed to providing additional financial support for infrastructure delivery to enable the Northern Ireland Executive to invest in a range of potential capital projects such as Narrow Water Bridge. The Irish Government also stated their readiness to jointly progress consideration of options for the development of the Narrow Water Bridge project at the North South Ministerial Council.

I will be reviewing the options that have been considered to support future development of Narrow Water in coming weeks. I recognise the importance of the Narrow Water Bridge project in linking the communities on both sides of the lough and maximising the tourism potential of this cross border region whilst protecting the natural environment in this area of historic and ecological significance.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what progress has been in providing a new bus station in Kilkeel.

(AQW 934/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the potential which new bus stations could provide to areas such as Kilkeel. While Translink will continue to look at opportunities for the location of a new bus station in Kilkeel, it is too early to comment on availability of capital funding required to deliver this project. I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints with significant pressures across my Department. I will be assessing these pressures reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure what actions her Department is taking to ensure the shoreline of Lough Neagh can be travelled by car or bicycle without significant detours, such as at Bannfoot, Craigavon.

(AQW 935/17-22)

Ms Mallon: At present my Department is not actively progressing plans to improve cycling or vehicular routes around the Lough Neagh shoreline. My Department is currently preparing local transport plans in conjunction with the Councils' Local Development Plans. I would expect any new local routes to be agreed and supported by the Councils.

Given the severe and challenging budget constraints I have inherited, I will be assessing the pressures across my department reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. Active travel routes are something I am keen to progress, however it is too early to comment on which routes will be progressed.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are plans to expand the present road gritting network.
(AQW 946/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In general, my Department salts the main through routes that carry more than 1,500 vehicles per day and in exceptional circumstances, roads with difficult topography and carrying between 1,000 and 1,500 vehicles per day. Small settlements in rural areas containing 100 dwellings or more also have salted links to roads on the main salted network. The application of this policy ensures an equitable service across Northern Ireland and ensures that 28% of the total road network, which carries around 80% of traffic, is salted at an annual cost of between £5 million and £7million.

The current policy also allows for unscheduled secondary and emergency requests where additional salting may be undertaken, for example, to assist access for the emergency services or some other unforeseen occurrence of that nature such as a funeral. Arrangements are also in place to provide priority secondary salting to schools which have had to close due to inaccessibility, associated solely with the presence of snow or ice on the adjacent network.

I would like to be able to expand our gritting service to many other routes but it is simply not feasible to do this at present due to the severe budget constraints and many other pressures faced by my Department; an issue I hope to address with Executive Colleagues.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the (i) design; and (ii) replacement of Roscor Viaduct, Co. Fermanagh.
(AQW 952/17-22)

Ms Mallon: A detailed inspection of Roscor viaduct was carried out in 2016. This included an examination of the extent of corrosion on the bridge and an underwater inspection of the bridge foundations.

An options study to determine the most appropriate means of strengthening the bridge and replacing the missing northern span, currently accommodated by the temporary Bailey bridge, is now nearing completion.

Progression of a scheme thereafter will depend on the availability of funding and the priority of the scheme when compared with other competing projects. I would like to be able to do much more bridge strengthening and maintenance work, and indeed work relating to many other responsibilities of my Department, but my capacity to do so is limited due to the severe budget constraints that I have inherited.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Infrastructure an update on the York Street Interchange project.
(AQW 967/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As you may be aware, the procurement process to award a contract for the detailed design phase of this scheme was halted in early 2017 as result of a legal action, which concluded in September 2019, with the award of contract being set aside. My Department is now considering options for a new procurement strategy.

While I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints, I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland. I will be assessing the pressures across my Department reflecting on priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. It is too early to comment on the precise funding available for this scheme.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the future of the MOT Centre at Newbuildings, Londonderry.
(AQW 978/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am working to restore all MOT centres to normal operational levels following the disruption caused due to suspended services following cracks discovered in vehicle lifts. I can assure the member I will explore all options to restore business as usual.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency has seen the demand for vehicle tests steadily increase over the past decade and this is projected to continue. At this stage, it is too early to comment on the future network of MOT centres, but I will be considering how best to ensure a sustainable solution is put in place and that future demand for vehicle testing is addressed.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline what resident only parking schemes are currently in place in the Foyle constituency; and (ii) whether there are any additional schemes being considered.
(AQW 979/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The first residents' parking scheme in Rugby Road / College Park Avenue, Belfast, came into operation during April 2018. A review of the scheme, which will reflect the needs, experiences and feedback of residents, is currently underway. I will want to make sure that any lessons learnt from this scheme inform wider policy on implementing residents' parking schemes.

A scheme planned for the Rossville Street area has not proceeded as quickly as anticipated due to a level of public opposition, and a smaller scheme in the area is currently being considered. I can assure the Member that my officials are assessing these in the context of developing a new approach to residents' parking schemes that incorporates the learning from the first scheme.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the areas where NI Water have no capacity to connect new housing developments to the sewerage network.

(AQW 983/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there are about 100 areas under some form of development constrains due to capacity issues affecting wastewater systems.

Details are provided on the NI Water Website under Services for Developers and wastewater capacity: <https://www.niwater.com/wastewater-capacity/>

NI Water encourages developers to contact them via the pre-development enquiry process and specific advice can be provided which may include a recommendation for a Network Capacity Check.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will introduce an MOT exemption for Vehicles of Historical Interest, similar to what has been introduced in Great Britain.

(AQW 984/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a disparity as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following lobbying from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be introduced here.

This is an issue that I wish to examine carefully, and I will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much would it cost his Department to repair every street light that is not working in North Down.

(AQW 989/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The cost to my Department of repairing all reported street lighting outages in the North Down area is estimated at approximately £160,000.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what areas of North Down are considered as a potential floodplain and at risk of flooding.

(AQW 990/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As part of my Department's work in implementing the EU Floods Directive a comprehensive suite of flood hazard maps have been developed. These maps have been prepared for areas that have been determined to be at a significant risk of flooding and show a number of urban floodplain areas in North Down that are at risk of flooding, including parts of Newtownards, Bangor, Dundonald and Comber.

Further information on the extent and location of these floodplains can be found on my Department's website, by accessing the following link:-

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/rivers-and-flooding/flood-maps-ni>.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of a potential road bridge being built between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

(AQW 991/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have not carried out an assessment on the potential of a road bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland. Given the challenges we face in maintaining the infrastructure we already rely on and in improving our public transport, cycling and walking, water and sewerage and roads networks, it is difficult to see how such a project would be either deliverable or affordable in the short to medium term.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the frequency of (i) regulatory; and (ii) safety checks at vehicle test centres, in the last three years.

(AQW 996/17-22)

Ms Mallon: During the last three years, all items of test hall equipment have been subject to a minor inspection every eight weeks and a major inspection every six months. During the six monthly major inspections the Vehicle lifts and onsite Air compressors also receive an independent periodic thorough examination.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the funding for bus shelter improvements and maintenance.

(AQW 997/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department owns 1,395 bus shelters throughout Northern Ireland. The majority of these are managed by Translink on the Department's behalf. In addition local Councils also own and maintain a significant number of bus shelters

within their areas. Translink manage the maintenance of the Department's bus shelters by means of a contract with Clear Channel. This operates for a period of five years starting in April 2017. The costs of cleaning and maintenance are covered by Clear Channel in exchange for advertising rights at the shelters.

My Department has provided funding of £300,000 in 2019/20 for the provision of new and replacement bus shelters.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many visitors have been to the Silent Valley Reservoir, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1005/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Visitor numbers to the Silent Valley Reservoir in the last five years are as follows:

- 2015 - 50,614
- 2016 - 59,010
- 2017 - 66,102
- 2018 - 74,761
- 2019 - 74,999

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure what discussions she has had with taxi firms with a view towards ensuring that taxis suitable for transporting disabled people can be booked on the same basis as any other.

(AQW 1024/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have not met with any taxi firms to date on the matter of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis, however I want to take the time to consider the issues carefully. I understand that there are a number of areas of the current taxi regime that continue to generate interest and concern among stakeholders and I intend to consider the issues in greater detail in coming weeks.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure what consideration she is giving to (i) increasing the penalties; or (ii) broadening offences for using phones or electronic devices whilst in charge of a vehicle.

(AQW 1026/17-22)

Ms Mallon: It is an offence to drive a vehicle in Northern Ireland while 'using' a hand-held mobile phone or similar device. The offence is currently punishable by a fixed penalty of £60 and three penalty points.

In March 2018, my Department consulted on proposals to increase both the fixed penalty and the penalty points for this offence. It also sought views on updating the law to better reflect modern day usage of mobile phones and electronic devices. The responses received demonstrated clear support for an increase to the current fixed penalty and penalty points.

As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety I am determined to reduce the number of road deaths and serious injuries. Key to this is taking care when driving and showing concern for other road users. I plan to consider this issue carefully in the coming weeks, before taking a decision on the way forward.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what progress (a) she has made; or (b) can be made to clear the backlog of street lighting repairs; and (ii) the current number of outages in North Antrim.

(AQW 1033/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand and share the concerns of those affected by street light outages and am working with my Department to address this issue as quickly as possible. Unfortunately as a result of severe budget cuts the Department has had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result, outages are taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired. I can assure the Member that priority is being given to hazardous electrical defects and group outages and that my officials are doing all that they can, within available budgets, to complete other repairs in as timely a fashion as possible. I have also raised this issue with the Minister of Finance as I recognise how important it is to building public confidence and safety.

There are currently 3913 street lighting outages reported in Northern Division, which includes the North Antrim area.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) her Department has identified all the land in their ownership in the Victoria Barracks area of New Lodge, where an unwanted bonfire took place in August; and (ii) her officials have communicated this to the Housing Executive.

(AQW 1037/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The roads around the old Victoria Barracks site are adopted and maintained but not owned by my Department and (ii) the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are aware of this.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many MOT tests have been cancelled due to the current backlog.

(AQW 1040/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As of the 9 February, the DVA system showed that 28,397 MOTs tests had been conducted and 31,296 MOTs had been cancelled. However, as the situation is ongoing this figure changes daily.

The current situation is not acceptable and I have instructed the DVA to work urgently to get a safe, sustainable and trusted service up and running as soon as and as safely as possible. Testing on heavy goods vehicles and buses is continuing and the heavy duty lanes are also being used to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers, for private customers and dealerships. All other customers except taxis and those with four year old cars will be automatically issued an MOT exemption certificate which they can use to tax their vehicle and thereby continue to drive. I have also instructed officials to ensure extended opening hours are in place in order to minimise disruption to customers.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network. Their deployment has now been accelerated due to the current disruption. These lifts have been independently assessed and checked before becoming operational. Three existing lifts which had no cracks have also been independently checked and are now operational.

I have also instructed my Permanent Secretary to commission two separate reviews, which I will oversee. The first is an investigation of the timeline and events that led up to the situation that arose last night. I need greater assurance than I have at present about the maintenance and testing regime in operation and about the way in which initial concerns about the lifting equipment were followed up and addressed. I want to know the precise timeline and to understand who knew what and when and all actions taken. This review will be carried out independently by professional auditors managed from outside the Department.

I have also commissioned a second review which will be carried out by an external expert who will provide me with independent advice on the steps that need to be taken to return our MOT centres urgently to a position where a full testing service can be provided. I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will give direction for the resurfacing of the B40, Moneyneeny Road, Draperstown.

(AQW 1044/17-22)

Ms Mallon: It is acknowledged that sections of the B40 Moneyneeny Road are in need of resurfacing and a scheme from the C524 Moydamlaght Road to the U5262 Drumderg Road is considered to be a relatively high priority by my engineering officials. This scheme will be considered for inclusion in future works programmes. While I appreciate the need and would like to do more for our communities, unfortunately my capacity to do so is limited by the severe budget constraints that I have inherited.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will give direction for the upgrade to the C554/B47 Sixtowns Road to go ahead.

(AQW 1045/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I note the Sixtowns Road is a lightly trafficked rural road and it would be therefore difficult to justify upgrading it, particularly under current financial constraints. However, I note that under the scheduled maintenance programme in 2019, the Department completed two significant resurfacing schemes along this section of road, and renewed and upgraded a large section of drainage to help alleviate a problem of surface water on the road surface.

While I would like to deliver better for our communities and to do more works on the Sixtowns Road and indeed on many other roads, unfortunately I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints and consequently there are no current plans to upgrade the C554/B47 Sixtowns Road. However, my officials will continue to inspect and repair any actionable defects, in line with current guidelines.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed sale of Portavoe Reservoir, Groomsport.

(AQW 1052/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised me that the prospective purchasers and NIW have executed the sale contracts and transfer deeds in respect of Portavoe Reservoir. It is anticipated that the sales of the various plots will complete shortly.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she has plans to consider creating a train halt at Belfast International Airport.

(AQW 1053/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to improving connectivity across Northern Ireland and to exploring options to enhance and promote public transport. However I have inherited severe budget cuts right across my Department and I am currently assessing pressures and priorities, including Executive Flagship projects, commitments within New Decade New Approach and my own priorities to improve lives, connect communities, grow our economy and tackle climate change.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposal from 2016 to introduce new legislation for Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles to bring it in line with Great Britain.

(AQW 1058/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Britain and Ireland.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) what discussions her Department has had with Derry City and Strabane District Council about the viability of City of Derry Airport after 31 March 2020; and (ii) what financial assistance has been provided to the airport, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1064/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I will answer your question in two parts as asked.

Officials from my Department and the Department of the Economy supported the Head of the Civil Service at a meeting with representatives from Derry City and Strabane District Council and the City of Derry Airport (CoDA) on 9 January 2020. The discussion focused on the financial challenges facing CoDA and the Council. It was agreed that the parties would work together to explore the possibility of mitigating this burden. Any proposition emerging from this work will be for Ministers to determine.

My Department has not provided any financial assistance to CoDA in the last three years.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many streetlights are currently awaiting (a) repair; or (b) replacement in East Antrim, and (ii) what action will be taken to address the backlog.

(AQW 1075/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand the concerns of the public affected by street light outages and am working with my Department to address this issue as quickly as possible. Unfortunately as a result of severe budget cuts the Department has had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result, outages are taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired. I can assure the Member that priority is being given to hazardous electrical defects and group outages and that my officials are doing all that they can, within available budgets, to complete other repairs in as timely a fashion as possible.

There are currently 3913 street lighting outages reported in Northern Division, which includes the East Antrim area.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to change the age at which Vehicles of Historical Interest are exempt from MOT tests, similar to what has been introduced in Great Britain.

(AQW 1084/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a disparity as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following lobbying from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be introduced here.

This is an issue that I wish to examine carefully, and I will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the current arrangements for testing vehicle diesel emissions at MOT test centres.

(AQW 1085/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Most vehicle tests for cars and light goods vehicles are currently suspended because of a problem with the vehicle lifts throughout the test centre network.

However for those cars and light goods vehicles which are currently being tested, the diesel emissions are subject to a visual inspection. In addition, since May 2019, where a vehicle has an illuminated engine malfunction indicator lamp (MIL), which identifies defects in the engine emission control systems, the vehicle will fail the test. Since the introduction of the MIL as a testable item over 4,000 vehicles have failed the test on that item alone and have had to be fixed and retested.

A diesel emissions test is conducted on all heavy goods vehicles, buses and vans over 3,500kgs, in compliance with the Roadworthiness Directive.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether she has any plans to meet the SmartPass campaign group; and (ii) for her assessment of their request that the Concessionary Fares Scheme is brought in line with similar schemes in the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 1086/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am planning to meet the SmartPass Equality Campaign group to discuss their request to extend full-fare concession to all who are currently eligible to receive half-fare discount.

The existing Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme already provides access to a wider range of transport options than equivalent schemes in Great Britain, including access to rail and with no restrictions during the peak period. However, while the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme provides for full-fare concession for eligible disabled people, in Northern Ireland this is restricted to a half-fare concession. I recognise the concerns which have been raised in this regard. However, the concessionary fares scheme, as with many areas across my Department, is already under significant pressure, reflecting the severe and challenging budget constraints under which my Department has operated over recent years. Therefore, in advance of taking decisions, I will be assessing the full range pressures, reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade; New Approach", and the budget made available for the period ahead.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans are there to obtain affirmative resolution in the Assembly for regulations provided within the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to allow electric assisted pedal cycles to be categorised and controlled in the same way as the rest of the United Kingdom and the European Union.

(AQW 1092/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Great Britain and other European countries.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what further schemes are planned for the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen road; (ii) what stage they are at; and (iii) the projected cost of each scheme.

(AQW 1094/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Direction and Vesting Orders have been made and site clearance works completed for a road improvement scheme at Cornamuck, on the A32 between Omagh and Enniskillen. This scheme is estimated to cost £5m. A further scheme at Kilgortnaleague, with an estimated cost £6.9m, has been identified and has advanced to the Preferred Route stage.

My Department is currently developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan. Potential road, and public transport projects, including the A32 improvements, are being tested against a framework of economic, environmental and social objectives, including safety and connectivity.

I expect to consider draft proposals and options in line with my priorities to address regional imbalance, improve connectivity across Northern Ireland and improve lives and opportunities. Once I have identified my preferred options and priorities, I intend to issue a draft plan for public consultation later this year. It is, therefore, too early to comment on the progression of specific schemes.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will bring forward legislation for the road use of e-bikes.

(AQW 1101/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Britain and Ireland.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) her Department's plans for a further consultation into the Rossville Street Area Resident's Parking Scheme; and (ii) whether other schemes are being considered in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 1103/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The first residents' parking scheme in Rugby Road / College Park Avenue, Belfast, came into operation during April 2018. A review of the scheme, which will reflect the needs, experiences and feedback of residents, is currently underway. I will want to make sure that any lessons learnt from this scheme inform wider policy on implementing residents' parking schemes.

A scheme planned for the Rossville Street area of Derry has not proceeded as quickly as anticipated due to a level of public opposition, and a reduced scheme in the area is currently being considered. I can assure the Member that my officials are assessing these in the context of developing a new approach to residents' parking schemes that incorporates the learning from the first scheme.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether NI Railways plans to increase the number of trains travelling from Derry to Belfast on a Sunday.

(AQW 1104/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister I recognise the key role our rail and wider public transport network has to play in enhancing the connectivity of the North West region. This is essential if we are to address a key barrier to regional balance whilst playing our part in tackling the climate emergency. In line with that Translink are currently undertaking a feasibility study to introduce an hourly frequency on a Sunday and additional early morning and late evening trains to connect Belfast and Derry.

Given the severe budget constraints under which my Department has operated over recent years many of our existing services are already under considerable pressure. While I will not allow that to limit my ambition, in taking decisions I will be assessing the full range of pressures reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether NI Railways plans to extend the time at which the last train departs from Belfast to Derry on a Saturday.

(AQW 1105/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Currently the last train service to Derry on a Saturday night departs Belfast at 21:10. Whilst a later service departs Belfast at 22:40 I understand this currently stops at Coleraine and does not travel onto Derry for operational reasons. Given the priority which I attach to rail and the wider public transport network in enhancing connectivity and addressing a key barrier to balanced regional growth, I plan to explore with Translink the potential for the 22:40 service departing Belfast on a Saturday night to continue onto Derry.

Given the severe budget constraints under which my Department has operated over recent years many of our services are already under considerable pressure. Therefore I will assess the extension of rail services alongside the full range of pressures across my Department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure what arrangement her Department has made, in conjunction with DVA, to compensate taxi drivers for loss of earnings when their vehicle is off the road as a result of not being able to get an MOT.

(AQW 1125/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current situation is not acceptable and I have instructed the DVA to work urgently to get a safe, sustainable and trusted service up and running as soon as and as safely as possible. Testing on heavy goods vehicles and buses is continuing and the heavy duty lanes are also being used to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers, for private customers and dealerships. All other customers except taxis and those with four year old cars will be automatically issued an MOT exemption certificate which they can use to tax their vehicle and thereby continue to drive. I have also instructed officials to prioritise taxis and 4 year old vehicles and minimise disruption to customers.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network. Their deployment has now been accelerated due to the current disruption. Three existing lifts have also been inspected and cleared for use. These lifts are being used to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers for private customers and dealerships.

I have also instructed my Permanent Secretary to commission two separate reviews, which I will oversee. The first is an investigation of the timeline and events that led up to the situation that arose last night. I need greater assurance than I have at present about the maintenance and testing regime in operation and about the way in which initial concerns about the lifting equipment were followed up and addressed. I want to know the precise timeline and to understand who knew what and when and all actions taken. This review is being carried out independently by professional auditors managed from outside the Department.

I have also commissioned a second review which is being carried out by an external expert who will provide me with independent advice on the steps that need to be taken to return our MOT centres urgently to a position where a full testing service can be provided. I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority.

I would encourage the Member to pass to the Department contact details of any taxi driver who has been put off the road as a result of not being able to get an MOT test as DVA is working to prioritise taxi vehicles to prevent this from happening.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to review the street light policy, given that it does not take account of the impact in built up areas of absorption of the light by parked vehicles.

(AQW 1126/17-22)

Ms Mallon: When designing street lighting schemes, my Department follows the procedures recommended in the British Standard code of practice for the design of road lighting (BS 5489). This standard gives guidance on the lighting levels to be provided, based on the characteristics of a road or footpath and recognises that the presence of on-street parking is one of the factors to be considered as part of the design process. In some instances, an increase in lighting levels may be justified, or the arrangement of lighting columns may be altered, to mitigate the effect of parked vehicles.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the lifts in MOT centres which were welded are capable of supporting the same vehicle weight as prior to the repair.

(AQW 1149/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The lifts with cracks which were welded have been suspended from use from the evening of 27 January 2020 following independent assessment.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure when her Department was first made aware of the problem with lifts in MOT centres.

(AQW 1150/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The first time that the Driver & Vehicle Agency was made aware of the issue was on 25 November 2019 when they received a copy of the six monthly independent periodic thorough examination report, conducted by the insurance inspector. The report was from an inspection on 6 November in Larne test centre and it highlighted that two vehicle lifts were found to have cracks on the scissor pivot pin bush collar which required investigation and rectifying. The contractor confirmed there were no safety concerns regarding the safe operation of the lifts. On 3 January 2020 the DVA Health and Safety manager, upon learning of further cracks, requested immediate independent inspections of all DVA vehicle lifts as a precautionary measure, although no safety concerns were raised. On 27 January, the contractor could not give sufficient assurances to DVA on the effectiveness of the ongoing repairs and the use of the lifts was therefore suspended in order to protect the health and safety of staff and customers, which remains my top priority.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she will reassure staff in MOT centres about lifts which have been welded if they have concerns about the lifts being unsafe to use and are compromising their safety.

(AQW 1151/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The health and safety of all staff and customers visiting MOT centres is my first priority. In ensuring their safety, there has been disruption to services and inconvenience caused to customers due to a fault identified with vehicle lifts in MOT centres. The lifts with faults identified are currently suspended from use.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. Three existing lifts have also been cleared by independent assessors for use and are now fully operational.

I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers and see the return of safe and fully operable MOT Centres across Northern Ireland as quickly as possible but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority. Test centre equipment will only be brought back into operation when I am assured that the safety of DVA staff and customers is guaranteed.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) staff in MOT centres have been advised not to use shaker plates on lifts after repairs; and (ii) this will impact (a) the test; and (b) vehicle safety.

(AQW 1152/17-22)

Ms Mallon: During routine maintenance inspections, faults were identified in some of the vehicle scissor lifts. As an interim measure to reduce additional stress on scissor lifts, staff were advised not to use the shaker plates, front and back. Examiners can use a manual check to replace the equipment check. The steering turn plate for checking track rod ends is still used and ensures the integrity of all the elements of the test and vehicle safety.

Following further inspections of lift faults in MOT centres, the contractor was unable to provide sufficient assurance to the DVA on the effectiveness of the ongoing repairs. To ensure the health and safety of staff and customers and as a precautionary measure, DVA moved immediately to suspend all MOT testing for cars and light goods vehicles with immediate effect.

I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers and see the return of safe and fully operable MOT Centres across Northern Ireland as quickly as possible but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority. Test centre equipment will only be brought back into operation when I am assured that the safety of DVA staff and customers is guaranteed.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much has been spent on outsourcing the maintenance of DVA vehicle testing equipment, since 2017.

(AQW 1153/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The total spend on DVA Vehicle planned testing equipment maintenance since 2017 has been £1,753,382.98 to date.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) when; and (ii) by whom the decision was taken to outsource the maintenance of DVA vehicle testing equipment.

(AQW 1154/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The maintenance of DVA vehicle testing equipment has been outsourced under contracts dating back to at least 2001.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to bring the maintenance of DVA vehicle testing equipment in-house.

(AQW 1157/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current situation is not acceptable and I have instructed the DVA to work urgently to get a safe, sustainable and trusted service up and running as soon as and as safely as possible. Testing on heavy goods vehicles and buses is continuing, heavy duty lanes are also being used and MOT opening hours are being extended to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers, for private customers and dealerships. All other customers except taxis and those with four year old cars will be automatically issued an MOT exemption certificate which they can use to tax their vehicle and thereby continue to drive. I have also instructed officials to ensure extended opening hours are in place in order to minimise disruption to customers.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network. Their deployment has now been accelerated due to the current disruption. Three existing lifts have also been inspected and cleared for use. These lifts are being used to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers for private customers and dealerships.

I have also instructed my Permanent Secretary to commission two separate reviews, which I will oversee. The first is an investigation of the timeline and events that led up to the situation that has arisen. I need greater assurance than I have at present about the maintenance and testing regime in operation and about the way in which initial concerns about the lifting equipment were followed up and addressed. I want to know the precise timeline and to understand who knew what and when and all actions taken. This review is being carried out independently by professional auditors managed from outside the Department.

I have also commissioned a second review which is being carried out by an external expert who will provide me with independent advice on the steps that need to be taken to return our MOT centres urgently to a position where a full testing service can be provided. I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority. There are currently no plans to bring the maintenance of DVA vehicle testing equipment in-house

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) what financial support was offered by the Government in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the A5 road upgrade when the project was first announced; and (ii) the level of funding that has been provided to date.

(AQW 1158/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As part of the New Decade, New Approach, the Irish Government has re-affirmed its £75million commitment to the A5 project up to 2022.

I can confirm that the level of funding provided to date by the Irish Government is £22million.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of lives lost in the five years (i) before progressing the A5 WTC scheme; and (ii) following completion.

(AQW 1166/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The latest information made available to my Department from PSNI, indicates that during the period 2014 to 2018 there have been 15 collisions resulting in 18 fatalities along the A5 route, between New Buildings and the border at Aghnacloy.

The safety benefits that could potentially be realised from road network improvement schemes are currently estimated using a 60-year post completion appraisal model. It is not possible to be precise about lives saved in the five years post scheme completion. However, I understand that the full A5 scheme could result in a saving of over 2000 collisions with an estimated reduction of almost 2750 casualties, including 19 fatalities, over a 60-year period.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for her assessment of the benefits of the proposed Strathfoyle Greenway; and (ii) whether her Department will work alongside other relevant Departments to secure its delivery.

(AQW 1170/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As outlined in my answer to AQW 234/17-22, I believe that greenways have the potential to bring significant benefits to us all. In common with greenway proposals from other Councils, the development of the proposed Strathfoyle Greenway by Derry City and Strabane District Council has the potential to deliver on these benefits. It also has the potential to provide a walking and cycling route to connect the community at Strathfoyle with the city and the new Northwest Multimodal Transport Hub.

I am keen to work with other Ministers and with all stakeholders to deliver on projects that have the potential to improve the lives of people and connect communities. However, before I take decisions in relation to funding, I will need to carefully consider the budget position.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to remove electrically assisted pedal cycles from registration licensing and other regulatory requirements.

(AQW 1184/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Britain and Ireland.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many of the pieces of Driver and Vehicle Agency equipment which failed assessment were due to be maintained by an outsourced company.

(AQW 1218/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The 52 lifts which had faults were being maintained by an outsourced company.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure what were the limits stipulated by the manufacturer on the use of vehicle lifts at MOT centres regarding; (i) the number of years that each lift should be used; (ii) the number of tests to be carried out.

(AQW 1228/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The manufacturer did not stipulate any limits regarding (i) the number of years that each lift should be used; (ii) the number of tests to be carried out.

Ms Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) her Department's policy for the renewal of signage on the strategic route network; (ii) whether there is a programme for replacement of defective signage in the Western Division; and (iii) the financial allocation in 2019/20 for the programme in Western Division.

(AQW 1241/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Inspection of signs on all routes is undertaken as part of my Department's normal highway cyclical maintenance inspections. During these inspections, defective signs are recorded for repair or replacement, in accordance with the current roads maintenance guidelines.

Defective signs can be replaced on a priority basis, as part of a planned schedule of maintenance work, or alternatively as part of a sign upgrade project, on a route by route basis. If a large number of defects have been recorded on a particular route during maintenance inspections, consideration is given to upgrading and replacing all defective signage on that route. The funding allocated to sign replacement in 2019/2010 in Western Division is £75,000 and while I would like to be able to do more to address this important issue, my capacity to do so is limited by the severe financial constraints that I have inherited.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on plans for a park and ride facility at Strabane bus centre.

(AQW 1245/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since 2013, my Department has delivered an additional 3,400 Park and Ride spaces across Northern Ireland. These facilities have proven highly attractive and played a central role in the growth of passenger numbers on our rail and Goldline services. My Department works in conjunction with Translink to develop and deliver the Park and Ride programme for NI. The programme does not currently have plans for additional Park and Ride facilities at Strabane bus centre. However, the provision of Park and Ride for Strabane is being considered in conjunction with the design of the A5 road project.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure when her Department will allocate the funding necessary to allow NI Water to carry out the required upgrade of the sewage capacity at Drumaness Wastewater Treatment Works.

(AQW 1364/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that an upgrade for the Drumaness Wastewater Treatment Works is scheduled in the Price Control 21 (PC21) Business Plan, covering the period 2021 - 2027 submitted by NI Water to the Utility Regulator in January 2020.

The prioritisation of works during any Price Control period is led by the Utility Regulator, in consultation with NI Water and its other statutory regulators. It is also subject to adequate funding being made available and assuming there are no land acquisition requirements.

As Minister, I have inherited a range of capital pressures and, although I am determined to prioritise investment in water and wastewater infrastructure, I am also conscious of the need to address regional imbalance, improve connectivity and address climate change within current budget restrictions. I am therefore unable to confirm the timing for the upgrade to this Wastewater Treatment Works until the Final Determination for PC21 is issued by the Utility Regulator and my budgetary position has been confirmed.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the costs to have an MOT for (i) a car; (ii) a taxi; (iii) an 8-16 seat minibus; (iv) a 17-35 seat minibus; and (v) a 36+ seat bus.

(AQW 1430/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The statutory test fee for a private car is £30.50, and the statutory test fee for a private bus is £41.50 irrespective of the number of passenger seats.

The statutory taxi licence fee is £138.50, which includes a contribution to the costs for taxi testing, licensing, plating and enforcement.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she plans to address the lack of, since 2006, diesel emission tests by the Driver and Vehicle Agency for cars and light goods vehicles under 3,500kgs.

(AQO 108/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Driver and Vehicle Agency currently conducts a diesel emissions test on all heavy goods vehicles, buses and vans over 3,500kgs, and a partial diesel emissions test for cars and light goods vehicles. This includes a visual inspection of the vehicle's emissions and a check of the engine Malfunction Indicator Lamp (MIL), which indicates a defect in the vehicle emission control systems.

The re-introduction of a full emissions test for cars and light goods vehicles under 3,500kgs, will require a significant investment in the vehicle testing estate to create a safe environment for staff and customers, in which an emissions test for diesel cars and light vehicles can be conducted.

I recognise this is a highly important matter and I will be giving this matter careful consideration and examining what options are available to address this matter, alongside urgent steps to return our MOT centres to a position where a full testing service can be provided. Given the climate change emergency, it is essential that my department does all it can to reduce diesel emissions.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of community transport provision in rural areas.

(AQO 102/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I clearly recognise the important contribution that community transport makes towards delivering Programme for Government ambitions and connecting some of our most vulnerable people and rural communities.

I am committed to finding solutions to protect and maintain community and rural transport services. However, we all need to recognise that the benefits of community transport go well beyond my Department, impacting across the full range of Programme for Government outcomes. The fact that health related trips currently account for one quarter of all community transport journeys, is a perfect illustration of these wider impacts.

Severe constraints in my Department's budgets over recent years has resulted in reduced funding across a range of areas including community transport and the public transport network with Translink. This has created significant challenges and is not sustainable if we collectively are to deliver on our Programme for Government ambitions.

At a time of constrained budgets, delivering my ambitions for community transport will require innovation, greater collaboration and cross-Departmental working. I hope that Executive colleagues and all parties will support my efforts to ensure the most vulnerable across our communities and our rural areas can continue to benefit from these essential services.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will consider setting up a telephone booking line for dealerships and independent mechanic businesses needing to book MOT tests for (i) four year old vehicles; and (ii) commercial vehicles.

(AQW 1842/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) opened a priority vehicle contact line on Tuesday, 11 February. This priority line is open 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday. The contact line is for use by three priority vehicle groups which include four year old cars due their first MOT, taxis and car dealerships. Under current legislation these groups are unable to avail of the Temporary Exemption Certificate being issued to other car owners.

Temporary Exemption Certificates are also being automatically issued to owners of three year old light goods vehicles. Testing of heavy goods vehicles, buses, motorcycles and re-tests remains unaffected by the current disruption and those customers should continue to attend appointments.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the extent and nature of the Just Park data breach reported on 07 February 2020; and (ii) what steps are being taken to rectify problems with Just Park.

(AQW 1850/17-22)

Ms Mallon: On 7 February 2020, JustPark was made aware of a data incident, where a Corporate Account client had been given elevated permission to their back office systems. The client used this elevated permission, which had been granted in error, to access data in respect of a number of parking sessions in a Belfast car park and for one other location outside Northern Ireland. No bank account information could be viewed and no data was released into the wider public domain.

JustPark notified the Information Commissioner's Office of this issue and after completing a pre report questionnaire, they were advised that a report was not required.

Justpark removed the elevated permission as soon as they identified the source of the problem and have put in place additional controls to prevent a repetition. My Department's officials are in daily contact via conference calls with our parking enforcement service provider (NSL) and their sub-contractor, (JustPark), to monitor the service and deal with any issues raised relating to the JustPark app or the service provided to customers, and to ensure they are resolved quickly. I have asked for an urgent report on the incident and a review of the contract in place with JustPark to ensure that its terms and conditions are rigorously enforced.

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps her Department is taking to make Rathlin a carbon-neutral island. (AQO 103/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The development of Rathlin as a carbon neutral island is a key aim of the Executive's Rathlin Island Policy and Action Plan for which my Department has lead responsibility on behalf of the Executive.

My officials have been working closely with the Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA) to support their ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030. Such proposals align with my key priorities of addressing regional imbalance and climate change.

I am looking forward to visiting the island in the near future to hear more about the community's plans. Through the work of the Rathlin Ministerial Forum, which I look forward to chairing, a report has been commissioned on the development of a sustainable island energy strategy for Rathlin.

My department is working with the Department for Communities to address the recommendations of this report and improve the energy efficiency of island homes.

My department is also collaborating with a number of island stakeholders to take forward a project with a range of ambitious aims which include exploring the feasibility of hydrogen powered or hybrid ferries; the introduction of electric cars and/or buses and a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB), all of which will be powered from renewable energy sources.

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Moira bypass. (AQO 104/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department is preparing a new suite of Transport Plans to set out new transport infrastructure proposals for delivery to 2035. The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan will be the first Transport Plan to be published in draft for consultation.

It is intended that this Plan will consider improvements to train services and to the main roads and motorways. Those improvements may help to reduce traffic flows through Moira. While the Plan will set out priorities, ultimately the improvements will be dependent on passing statutory procedures and funding.

In addition, my Department is also preparing a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan which includes Belfast and its wider catchment area including the growth ambitions of the Councils. The Transport Plan will consider the future commuter options, including local public transport and potentially a bypass of Moira.

I can assure the member I will look closely at all options. However, he will be aware that my Department has suffered budgetary constraints and I have inherited financial challenges. Working with all across this Assembly and the Executive I am committed to exploring what is possible to improve community connectivity and enhance citizens' lives.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to address regional economic imbalance through investment in infrastructure. (AQO 107/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There has been an historical underinvestment in many parts of the north which has created a need to rebalance the economy to enhance lives and create opportunities more evenly.

I am determined to approach my role recognising that infrastructure isn't an end in itself but rather a means to an end. Having a modern and sustainable water, drainage and transport infrastructure is an essential enabler to ensuring regionally balanced growth and in improving connectivity. My Department is about connecting people and opportunities.

I am committed to improving our infrastructure to help communities and make lives better with the funding made available to me. Water and sewerage infrastructure is key to unlocking potential growth and to deliver on the Programme for Government. It is essential to create jobs, build homes and grow our economy.

I am committed to improving connectivity by road and rail to enhance our public transport system and improve north-south connectivity. The Executive's Flagships schemes – the A5, A6 and Belfast Transport Hub – along with the York Street Interchange and Narrow Water Bridge schemes are front and centre in the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement. Improving connectivity, both in terms of our road and public transport networks, is vitally important if we, as an Executive, are to grow our economy and improve well-being in line with our aspirations. I want to progress as much as possible in my two year tenure.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will carry out a review of developer contributions to more effectively support local infrastructure.

(AQO 105/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Developers may already be required to make contributions to mitigate the impact of a proposal in order to overcome a policy or legislative barrier to the grant of planning permission, for example, the funding or provision of road improvement schemes or the inclusion of open space and recreational facilities.

All such contributions must be reasonable and related to the development proposal in question.

Following the transfer of planning functions to district councils in April 2015 government officials established a sub-group to look at how councils might approach this area of their work and a planned development management practice note was produced as guidance. Planning agreements are voluntary and some councils may make more use of them than others.

At this moment in time there are no plans for review.

The issue of wider developer contributions to regional infrastructure beyond site-specific mitigation, for example hospitals, water infrastructure and schools, is an issue which could be considered at Executive level in line with overall responsibilities for the funding and provision of such infrastructure.

As my Department is a key infrastructure department within the Executive I would be keen to contribute to any such work to investigate what role the planning system might play.

Mr Harvey asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the ongoing problems in vehicle test centres, whether she will introduce MOT exemptions for Vehicles of Historical Interest, similar to recent exemptions in Great Britain.[R]

(AQO 106/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In 2014, the EU Commission published EU Directive 2014/45 which set out the standards for roadworthiness testing across the European Union. The EU Directive replaced the Directive 2009/40/EC and included a number of compulsory provisions which had implications for motor vehicle testing in Northern Ireland.

As part of the Directive Member States were authorised to exempt Vehicles of Historical Interest (VHIs) from roadworthiness testing if they are at least 30 years old, no longer in production and have not had substantial changes made to them.

In 2018 Great Britain introduced a further exemption for vehicles which were manufactured or first registered not less than 40 years ago. This has led to a disparity as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest are treated in GB and NI as only vehicles manufactured before 1960 are currently exempt from periodic testing here.

My Department ran a consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views on whether the exemption should be introduced here. The consultation responses are being compiled for my consideration.

Given the volume of correspondence my Department has received on this issue recently, it is clear that there is a significant number of owners of such vehicles who wish to see a similar exemption here to that introduced in GB in 2018.

It is difficult to quantify the impact such a change would have on the ongoing MOT situation but it is an issue I am considering in its own right.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland.

(AQO 109/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I know this is a matter of sincere importance to the member and something I am also passionate about.

I am committed to connecting communities and encouraging more active travel to create a greener environment and to tackle the impact of climate change. Developing a safer, cleaner travel culture and making a real difference by enhancing opportunities for people and our places is central to my key priorities.

My Department has been operating under severe budget constraints for some years and priority has had to be given to the delivery of the Executive flagship projects. Nonetheless, the Department has been able to develop a number of important cycle and walking schemes and the details of these were provided to the Member in reply to his written question AQW 305/17-22 earlier this month.

Most notable among those are:

- Alfred Street and Upper Arthur Street segregated cycle lane;
- Durham Street, College Square North segregated cycle lane;
- College Street, Queen Street scheme;
- Middlepath Street scheme;
- Broadway Roundabout walking and cycling link to Bog Meadows;
- Comber Greenway improvements and widening.

As the member knows, I have also recently announced my plans to take forward legislation to encourage the use of electric bikes. In addition to the benefits of ebikes, there are exciting opportunities if we promote cycling. These include improving

physical and mental health and well-being, reducing social isolation and opening up possibilities for increasing cycling tourism.

Over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how best to deliver on my active and sustainable travel ambitions. Once the Budget process provides clarity on the resources available I will be able to firm up my objectives for cycling.

I look forward to working with the Member and other colleagues on this in the coming days and weeks.

Department of Justice

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice how many cases, at each court level, have been in the family justice system for more than five years.

(AQW 773/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): The Integrated Court Operation System (ICOS), contains data relating to court business across all court tiers. Information in the form requested is not readily extractable from ICOS and could only be obtained by the development of a bespoke IT report followed by an extensive manual exercise to quality assure the data.

The information could therefore only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice how many attacks have been recorded on places of worship in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) religious denomination; (ii) constituency; (iii) whether a hate crime was recorded; and (iv) the type of offence recorded.

(AQW 920/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department of Justice does not collect data on such attacks. This role is provided by the PSNI. However, I understand that there have been 445 criminal damage offences recorded at churches/religious buildings, churchyards or cemeteries in Northern Ireland between 2016/17 and 2018/19.

The PSNI have also advised that they do not hold the information which you have requested in the format which has been asked. However they publish data on Incidents and Crimes with a Hate Motivation on a quarterly basis.

The published report includes statistics on attacks on symbolic premises including churches and chapels.

The most recent report, published on 28 November 2019, is now available on the PSNI website at:

<https://www.psnipolice.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/hate-motivation-statistics/>

This report shows that there were 5 attacks recorded at churches or chapels between October 2017 and September 2018, and 8 attacks between October 2018 and September 2019.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, given the evident threat that remains to staff, whether she has given consideration for the reintroduction of the Prison Service Medal for those with 5 or more years' service since 2012.

(AQW 1061/17-22)

Mrs Long: There are no plans to reintroduce the Prison Service Medal at the current time. However, NIPS will continue to keep the consideration of medals under review.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice to provide a breakdown of the number of PSNI officers per Policing District in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1065/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the allocation of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice what is the anticipated timeline for the introduction of coercive control protections for victims of domestic violence.

(AQW 1123/17-22)

Mrs Long: My officials are currently working with Legislative Counsel to finalise a Domestic Abuse Bill for introduction locally. I would hope, with the agreement of the Executive, that the draft Bill could be introduced into the Assembly by April/May this year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many service animals have been injured over the last five years.

(AQW 1197/17-22)

Mrs Long: Two Northern Ireland Prison Service dogs have been injured during the past 5 years.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to outline the steps her Department is taking to address rural crime.
(AQW 1211/17-22)

Mrs Long: Rural crime is a cross-cutting issue which requires significant partnership working in the areas of prevention, protection and enforcement.

The key conduit for taking forward this work at a strategic level within the Department of Justice (DoJ) is the Rural Crime Partnership (RCP). The RCP consists of representatives from the DoJ, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Ulster Farmers' Union, NFU Mutual, Federation of Small Businesses, Young Farmers' Club of Ulster and the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs).

The primary focus of the RCP has been on developing a collaborative response to crime which is specific to rural areas – agricultural crime. In addition, my officials supporting the work of the Organised Crime Task Force provide information on emerging trends, concerns or threats that relate to the rural community specifically.

The RCP aims to deter opportunist crime and address the harm and vulnerability caused by crime through the promotion of crime prevention advice and by encouraging the farming community to report suspicious activity to the PSNI. For example, through the promotion of the Farm Watch Scheme which aims to reduce crime and the fear of crime in farming and rural communities; assisting with the development of an Ulster Farmers' Union led social media campaign to reduce incidents of livestock worrying; and supporting the delivery of a social media campaign, in conjunction with Crimestoppers, to encourage individuals in rural communities to report any information relating to suspicious or criminal activity.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), which are funded by my Department, ensure that the needs of rural communities are reflected in their action plans. PCSPs play a key role in building confidence locally, through engagement and consultation with communities on the issues that matter to them. PCSPs working within rural regions are taking forward a wide range of initiatives including Farm Watch, No Cold Calling, Neighbourhood Watch schemes and encouraging trailer and farm machinery marking.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 to address the problem of legal highs.
(AQW 1213/17-22)

Mrs Long: The provisions in the Psychoactive Substances Act were commenced by the Home Office on 26 May 2016, creating a blanket ban on the production, distribution, sale and supply of psychoactive substances in the United Kingdom.

Section 58 of the Psychoactive Substances Act required the Secretary of State to review the operation of the Act, prepare a report of the review and lay a copy of the report, before Parliament, 30 months after commencement.

In November 2018 the Home Office produced a report titled 'Review of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016' which provides a UK wide assessment of the effectiveness of Psychoactive Substances Act. This publication is available at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756896/Review_of_the_Psychoactive_Substances_Act__2016___web_.pdf

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to outline the programmes and support her Department are engaged in with the local community, to prevent young people getting a criminal record.
(AQW 1264/17-22)

Mrs Long: I recognise the long-term impact that having a criminal record can have, which is why early intervention is a key priority for my Department. We are working with children, families, communities and statutory and voluntary sector partners to address vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour through targeted support and intervention, to prevent children and young people being drawn into the criminal justice system.

Getting the right support at the right time is essential if we are to help those on the margins of the justice system and educate them on the consequences of risk taking and offending behaviour. In recognition of this, the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) has made some significant strategic and operational changes, with a dedicated Early Intervention (EI) team now appointed to support and develop the use of EI across all their regional teams, with designated EI workers in each region. This has been made possible through redirection and prioritisation of budgets – savings made from a reduction in numbers of court-ordered supervision cases have been invested in 'front end' services.

Prioritisation of this work has enabled staff to identify problems and intervene with children and families at a much earlier stage, before issues escalate. They deliver bespoke programmes of intervention and support families to access universal or specialist services in the community.

In a further development, a partnership with PSNI now enables YJA staff to support children referred by police when they have received a Community Resolution Notice (CRN) for low level offending. The onus is on educating and empowering children to make better-informed decisions and reduce likelihood of offending behaviour, rather than criminalising them through the formal system.

YJA's Schools Programme also continues to expand in line with this focus on EI. Whilst initially developed in 2015 in response to public disorder in North Belfast, YJA staff now engage with thousands of pupils each year through educational workshops

on issues which have the potential to bring children into the justice system e.g. antisocial behaviour, sexting, internet safety, drugs and alcohol etc.

Aside from the YJA work, you will also be aware that co-ordination of the cross Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime is hosted by my Department. Funding has been provided to projects which aim to build relationships with young people who are identified as being at higher risk of involvement in criminality and to deliver programmes that develop resilience and increase awareness of risk factors. The Executive Action Plan also supports projects which provide educational resources and activities to help young people develop new skills, build knowledge and examine their own attitudes to law and order.

The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS), administered by my Department, also provides funding for a range of projects aimed at preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime. While not specifically targeted at young people, many of the projects funded by ARCS provide a number of activities and interventions, often in community settings, including drug support projects, restorative justice initiatives and awareness and diversionary projects. In the current financial year, ARCS has allocated nearly £1million in funding to 49 projects across Northern Ireland.

The overall success of these partnership approaches to Early Intervention can clearly be seen. There have been significant reductions in both the numbers of children entering the justice system for the first time, and the numbers being dealt with through the formal court system. The latest statistics are attached at Annex A for your information.

As well as keeping children and young people out of the criminal justice system and thereby preventing them getting a criminal record, this work also helps to deliver on Outcome 7 of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) – We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other. This work is vital if we are to promote lawfulness and build a long-term civic society respectful of the law and others.

A new Community Safety Framework is also being developed to provide an operational roadmap on how to deliver these safer community aspirations set out in the PfG. This Framework will build on the previous Community Safety Strategy by supporting communities to be safe and resilient through crime prevention, whilst also addressing the issues of underlying harm and vulnerability that can lead to offending behaviour.

As a Department, I believe we have a very good story to tell on the work we are currently engaged in to prevent children and young people entering the justice system, and getting a criminal record, with all the negative consequences that often follow.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's plans to work with local communities to remove unwanted murals and interfaces in North Belfast.

(AQW 1265/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department of Justice's Interfaces Team lead on delivering the Executive's commitment to remove interface structures, as set out in the 'Together: building a united community (T:buc)' Strategy.

In North Belfast Departmental staff engage with community stakeholder groups in the New Lodge, Tiger's Bay, Lower Oldpark, Twaddell, Ardoyne, Woodvale, Glenbryn, Ballysillan, Ligoniel and Whitewell areas. Three projects are progressing at present:

Work will start in the Spring to remove a security interface fence adjacent to homes on North Queen Street following agreement from residents;

Construction work on the reduction and reimagining of a security fence on Duncairn Gardens, near Hillman Court, is underway; and work to remove security fencing at Squire's Hill/Hazelbrook Drive has been agreed with residents and will take place in the coming weeks.

A number of other potential interface reduction and removal schemes are being taken forward, including:

engagement with residents in the Woodvale area exploring their views on the opening of a pedestrian gate on to the Crumlin Road and the potential opening of Flax Street;

plans for a new automated gate to replace the existing fixed barriers on Flax Street are being drawn up;

engagement with residents living adjacent to Hazelwood Integrated Primary School about the potential removal of the security interface fence in the school grounds, to be replaced with school perimeter fencing; and

proposals to extend the opening times of pedestrian access gates on to Duncairn Gardens will be shared with local residents in the coming weeks.

The principles underpinning the Department's work, as set out in the 'Interfaces Programme Framework Document', ensures that we secure maximum community consent from people who live on both sides of an interface structure to support any reduction or removal scheme; taking account of the local context.

The Department of Justice has no responsibility for the removal of unwanted murals.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to outline any plans her Department has to support the re-establishment of the RADAR (Risk Avoidance Danger Awareness Resource) Centre.

(AQW 1292/17-22)

Mrs Long: Since the PSNI announced the closure of RADAR in October last year, representatives of a private company have been inquiring about the possibility of taking the Centre on as a going concern. My officials have been in contact with both the PSNI and the company in order to help facilitate, or answer any queries. However, any decision regarding the future of the Centre will be an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to outline whether any discussions have taken place between her Department and the PSNI to support the re-establishment of the RADAR (Risk Avoidance Danger Awareness Resource) Centre.
(AQW 1293/17-22)

Mrs Long: I refer the Member to the answer to the previous question AQW 1292/17-22.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice whether (i) historical murder investigations must be conducted by a qualified police homicide investigator; and (ii) how many qualified homicide investigators are currently within the PSNI.
(AQW 1306/17-22)

Mrs Long: The number of qualified homicide investigators within the PSNI is an operational matter for the Chief Constable and you may, therefore, wish to direct your question to him.

In relation to the proposed Historical Investigations Unit, staffing decisions would be a matter for the HIU Director. However, the draft legislation issued for consultation by the Northern Ireland Office required that HIU officers should include persons with experience of conducting criminal investigations in or outside Northern Ireland.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) preparations her Department have made for the instigation of the Historical Investigations Unit; and (ii) the cost of those preparations to her Department.
(AQW 1307/17-22)

Mrs Long: As part of its pre-planning, the Department engaged a Technical Adviser to advise on the operational implications of establishing a Historical Investigations Unit. He has prepared a series of options papers for an incoming HIU Director to inform key decisions on matters such as staffing, accommodation, ICT, information management and family support. The costs incurred for this work have been for the Technical Adviser's remuneration.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) how much has been spent by her Department on the Executive Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime in the last three years; and (ii) what is the projected spend for the next two years.
(AQW 1308/17-22)

Mrs Long: Please see the table below that indicates the past spend for the last three years (2016/17 – 2018/19) and what is projected for this year (2019/20) and next year (2020/21) for the Executive Action Plan as a whole.

	Yr 1: 2016-17 (£m)	Yr 2: 2017-18 (£m)	Yr 3: 2018-19 (£m)	Yr 4: 2019-20 (£m)	Yr 5: 2020-21 (£m)	Total
UK Government contribution	2	3	5	5.8	9.3	25
Northern Ireland Executive contribution	2	3	5	5.8	9.3	25
Total	4	6	10	11.6	18.6	50

The Action Plan is a cross-Executive effort and is co-ordinated by a team within the Department of Justice. The initial funding period runs from 2016/17 to 2020/21 and has an associated ring-fenced funding allocation of £50m, which is jointly provided by HM Treasury and the Executive. The projected spend for 2020-21 is part of those ring fenced funds.

Ending the harm caused by paramilitary groups was a stated commitment in the New Decade New Approach document. While no decision has yet been taken on funding after that date my officials are working with colleagues across the Executive and with delivery partners to ensure that the learning generated through implementing the existing commitments is built into delivery going forward.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 507/17-22, how and where are the orders now discharged open for inspection and reporting.
(AQW 1329/17-22)

Mrs Long: My officials have referred this matter to the Lord Chief Justice's Office who are currently undertaking enquiries. I will respond to the Member when I have received the outcome of their enquiries.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what actions her Department is taking to address rural crime.
(AQW 1360/17-22)

Mrs Long: Rural crime is a cross-cutting issue which requires significant partnership working in the areas of prevention, protection and enforcement.

The key conduit for taking forward this work at a strategic level within the Department of Justice (DoJ) is the Rural Crime Partnership (RCP). The RCP consists of representatives from the DoJ, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Ulster Farmers' Union, NFU Mutual, Federation of Small Businesses, Young Farmers' Club of Ulster and the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs).

The primary focus of the RCP has been on developing a collaborative response to crime which is specific to rural areas – agricultural crime. In addition, my officials supporting the work of the Organised Crime Task Force provide information on emerging trends, concerns or threats that relate to the rural community specifically.

The RCP aims to deter opportunist crime and address the harm and vulnerability caused by crime through the promotion of crime prevention advice and by encouraging the farming community to report suspicious activity to the PSNI. For example, through the promotion of the Farm Watch Scheme which aims to reduce crime and the fear of crime in farming and rural communities; assisting with the development of an Ulster Farmers' Union led social media campaign to reduce incidents of livestock worrying; and supporting the delivery of a social media campaign, in conjunction with Crimestoppers, to encourage individuals in rural communities to report any information relating to suspicious or criminal activity.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), which are funded by my Department, ensure that the needs of rural communities are reflected in their action plans. PCSPs play a key role in building confidence locally, through engagement and consultation with communities on the issues that matter to them. PCSPs working within rural regions are taking forward a wide range of initiatives including Farm Watch, No Cold Calling, Neighbourhood Watch schemes and encouraging trailer and farm machinery marking.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice (i) provide details of primary legislation that her Department will bring forward in this Assembly mandate; and (ii) provide the timetable for its introduction.

(AQW 1362/17-22)

Mrs Long: I intend to bring forward four separate Bills to the Assembly during the remainder of this mandate, including the introduction of three Bills before the end of this calendar year. I intend to introduce standalone Domestic Abuse and Committal Reform Bills before the summer 2020 recess, followed by a Stalking Bill this autumn.

I propose to introduce a further Criminal Justice Bill in early 2021, the content of which is still under consideration. This timeframe will ensure that the Bill can complete its Assembly scrutiny and passage before the House rises in Spring 2022 for the next local elections.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of staff in the Court Service on temporary promotion, broken down by grade; and (ii) how long these temporary promotions have been operation.

(AQW 1366/17-22)

Mrs Long: The following table details the information requested, as per part (i) of your question. This information reflects the position as at 2 January 2020.

Analogous Grade	Number of staff on temporary promotion at this grade
Executive Officer 2 (EO2)	4
Executive Officer 1 (EO1)	35
Staff Officer (SO)	12
Deputy Principal (DP)	7
Grade 7 (G7)	6
Grade 6 (G6)	5
Senior Civil Service (SCS)	1
Total	70

With regards to part (ii) of your question I can advise as follows:

- 26 of the temporary promotions are of a duration of less than 6 months
- 21 of the temporary promotions are of a duration of 6 to 12 months
- 23 of the temporary promotions are of a duration greater than 12 months

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the 253 recommendations contained in Sir John Gillen's Review Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1466/17-22)

Mrs Long: Implementation of the Gillen Review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences is included in New Decade, New Approach and is a key priority for my Department in the year ahead.

The Department is working with multi-agency partners to develop a phased implementation plan for the current mandate and beyond. The Criminal Justice Board has agreed that recommendations which will have the greatest impact on complainants going through the system should be prioritised. The detailed implementation plan, highlighting relevant dates and deliverables will be presented to the Criminal Justice Board at its next meeting and we will share this with the Justice Committee once available.

This is a complex and important piece of work, which requires engagement beyond the criminal justice system and I am determined that significant progress is made within the current mandate.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) all the troubles-related murder cases that have been reviewed and a report issued by the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) before it was wound up; and (ii) to detail all those cases that would fall, at present, into the remit of the Historical Investigation Unit (HIU).

(AQW 1474/17-22)

Mrs Long:

- (i) The information requested is not held by the Department. This is a matter for the Chief Constable and you may wish to direct your query to him.
- (ii) The legislation setting out the remit of the HIU has yet to be finalised. However, Schedule 3 of the draft Stormont House Agreement Bill sets out the categories of cases currently proposed as within the HIU's remit. These are cases within the remit of the HET or the Police Ombudsman's Historical Investigations Directorate that require further investigation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many valuations of the former Lisnevin site were undertaken, prior to the sale of the site.

(AQW 1619/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Lisnevin site formed part of the former Prison Service College at Millisle. During the period 2010-2017 Land & Property Services supplied two market valuations. One in 2010 and the other immediately prior to progressing the sale.

The sale process was concluded on 4th July 2018 through 'Best and Final Offers' which was successful in increasing the previous highest bid by a further £217,000 to £1,527,000.

On the basis that the market had been fully and extensively tested the District Valuer from Land & Property Services recommended acceptance of the highest offer.

Department for the Economy

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy what steps she will take to address inequities for local business in the apprenticeship levy scheme.

(AQW 704/17-22)

Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy): The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced by the UK government in April 2017, the levy is fiscal policy and is a reserved matter for the UK Parliament, there is no scope for derogation for Northern Ireland. Whilst Northern Ireland did receive the Barnett consequential from the levy this had no significant impact on the block grant.

In Northern Ireland, government supports the training of all apprenticeships for all private sector employers regardless of whether they pay Levy contributions, and I encourage all employers to avail of our ApprenticeshipsNI and the Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes.

Moving forward, I will assess appropriate measures to enhance our apprenticeship system and address the issues raised by employers during the consultation on the levy.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy to detail what additional budget resources her Department will require over the next three financial years in order to deliver all aspects of New Decade, New Approach pertaining to her Department's responsibilities.

(AQW 911/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Work is currently ongoing across the Department to cost the priorities identified in the New Decade, New Approach document. It will then be for the Executive as a whole to consider these in the context of the funding available.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy to outline how Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland are supporting the promotion of tourism activities in the Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Council area associated with Lough Neagh.

(AQW 936/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Tourism Northern Ireland's remit is to promote Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland markets.

It achieves this through fully integrated marketing campaigns targeted at specific market segments, which are based on extensive market research. These campaigns include TV, radio, press, outdoor promotions and digital and social marketing. In addition, all activity is under-pinned by extensive PR and media relations activity.

Tourism Northern Ireland remains committed to continuing the support and promotion of the tourism product and experience in the Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon Council area, including Lough Neagh, through its marketing campaigns, other promotional materials and consumer website.

It promotes Northern Ireland as a destination, highlighting specific attractions and experiences which resonate with its target segments.

Tourism Northern Ireland promoted Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon Council area, including Lough Neagh in its Autumn 2019 campaign, and it will be featured again in the Spring 2020 campaign.

As part of the 2019 campaign activity, Tourism Northern Ireland promoted experiences in the Armagh Banbridge Craigavon and surrounding area such as Armagh Cider Company tours, Wine & Brine, Newforge House, Blackwell House, F.E. McWilliam Gallery, Armagh planetarium and St. Patrick's Cathedral.

The wider Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon and Lough Neagh area also featured throughout the 2019 campaign on digital and social channels, featuring Lough Neagh Tours, Armagh Cider Company, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh Georgian Festival, Armagh Food & Cider Festival, Armagh Planetarium, Long Meadow Cider and FE McWilliam Gallery.

The international media visits team hosted journalists within the constituency of Armagh Banbridge Craigavon and surrounding area at visitor attractions including the Armagh Food & Cider festival, Navan Fort, Armagh Robinson Library, St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Tourism businesses in the Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Council area associated with Lough Neagh, are also invited to apply for funding support for the Tourism Northern Ireland Co-operative Marketing fund, to support their own promotional activity in the Republic of Ireland market.

Tourism Northern Ireland continues to work closely with the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) network, who collaborate with their tourism industry to upload information on the local area to Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer website discovernorthernireland.com.

Tourism Ireland

Tourism Ireland highlights Northern Ireland, including Armagh and Lough Neagh, across a range of marketing platforms, including TV, radio, print and digital advertising; publicity; co-operative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers, tour operators and travel agents; and attendance, with local tourism industry partners, at international holiday fairs and promotions.

In Spring 2019, Visit Armagh; Armagh City Hotel and the Game of Thrones Studio Tour, joined Tourism Ireland at Celtic Connections in Glasgow for the first promotion of the year in the Scottish market and Tourism Ireland's stand at World Travel Market in London in November.

Tourism Ireland held its March Board meeting in the Armagh City Hotel giving Board members the opportunity to meet some of the local tourism industry including representatives of Visit Armagh; the Charlemont Hotel; the Armagh City Hotel; the Game of Thrones Studio Tour and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

Also in March 2019, Burren Balsamics (based in Richhill) joined Tourism Ireland's pop-up promotion at London's Borough Market to showcase Northern Ireland food and drink in the run-up to St Patrick's Day and video content of the 'Celebrate St Patrick' choral event in Armagh was filmed by Tourism Ireland for use across digital channels.

In Summer 2019, Visit Armagh also joined Tourism Ireland for the 'Fill Your Heart with Ireland' sales blitz to Chicago, Dallas and Boston.

In September 2019, Tourism Ireland invited food and lifestyle journalists from the Netherlands, Sweden and India to Northern Ireland. Their itinerary included a visit to the Armagh Food and Cider Festival.

Also in September twenty-four coach and group tour operators, as well as a journalist writing for the Coach Tourism Association's magazine, visited Armagh to explore the Palace Demesne, Vicars Hill, Armagh Robinson Library and the Church of Ireland Crypt, the Navan Centre and Armagh Cider Company.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for the Economy to outline (i) a projected completion date; and (ii) costings for the new South West College, Enniskillen campus.

(AQW 948/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The projected completion date for the new South West College Erne campus in Enniskillen is 6th August 2020. The project is on track to achieve completion within the £29.149million budget approved in its business case.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy (i) whether St Mary's University College received capital funding from public funds to install its RHI boiler(s); and (ii) if so, how, then was it accredited under the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme, having regard to the position stated in the DETI guidance factsheet, as updated on 16 February 2015; and (iii) has any grant aid been repaid.

(AQW 974/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: St Mary's University College does not have any installations accredited under the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister for the Economy how Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland are supporting the promotion of tourism activities in the Mid Ulster Council area associated with Lough Neagh.

(AQW 986/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Tourism Northern Ireland's remit is to promote Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland markets.

It achieves this through fully integrated marketing campaigns targeted at specific market segments, which are based on extensive market research. These campaigns include TV, radio, press, outdoor promotions and digital and social marketing. In addition, all activity is under-pinned by extensive PR and media relations activity.

Tourism Northern Ireland remains committed to continuing the support and promotion of the tourism product and experience in the Mid Ulster Council area, including Lough Neagh, through their marketing campaigns, other promotional materials and consumer website.

It promotes Northern Ireland as a destination, highlighting specific attractions and experiences, which resonate with its target segments.

Tourism Northern Ireland promoted Mid Ulster Council area, including Lough Neagh, in the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland markets in their Autumn 2019 campaign, and it will be featured again in their Spring 2020 Campaign.

Tourism Northern Ireland's 2019 campaign activity, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, featured the Mid-Ulster and surrounding area, including experiences such as the River to Lough Festival, Lough Neagh Tours, Seamus Heaney HomePlace and Ardtara Country House.

Tourism Northern Ireland's international media visits team hosted journalists within the constituency of Mid-Ulster including Lough Neagh at visitor attractions in the area including Seamus Heaney HomePlace and River to Lough Festival.

Tourism businesses in the Mid Ulster Council area associated with Lough Neagh, are also invited to apply for funding support for the Tourism Northern Ireland Co-operative Marketing fund, to support their own promotional activity in the Republic of Ireland market.

Tourism Northern Ireland continue to work closely with the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) network, who collaborate with their tourism industry to upload information on the local area to Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer website, discovernorthernireland.com.

Tourism Ireland

Tourism Ireland highlights Northern Ireland, including Lough Neagh, across a range of marketing platforms, including TV, radio, print and digital advertising; publicity; co-operative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers, tour operators and travel agents; and attendance, with local tourism industry partners, at international holiday fairs and promotions.

Tourism Ireland continues to engage with Tourism Northern Ireland with a view to ensuring that visitor attractions such as Lough Neagh and the wider Mid Ulster area, are reflected in its overseas promotional materials, activities and marketing campaigns. For example:

The Seamus Heaney HomePlace in Bellaghy features in Phase Two of Tourism Ireland's global campaign 'Fill Your Heart with Ireland'. Advertising will be rolled out during 2020 in the top markets across the world, with phase one reaching an estimated 120 million people in 2019.

In Spring 2019, Tourism Ireland invited six Chinese travel agents from various cities around China including Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Chengdu and Shenzhen to visit the Seamus Heaney HomePlace in Bellaghy as part of a fact-finding visit to Northern Ireland. Tourism Ireland also invited presenters from six of America's most popular radio stations with a combined audience of 16 million listeners to visit Northern Ireland. Their itinerary included a visit to the Seamus Heaney HomePlace.

In April 2019, Tourism Ireland in London invited five leading cultural and lifestyle journalists – including The London Magazine, Classical Music Magazine, the Scottish Herald, The Daily Telegraph and the Guardian – to attend the 'In New Light' event at the Seamus Heaney HomePlace to mark what would have been Heaney's 80th birthday.

In April 2019, a group of international tour operators visited the Seamus Heaney HomePlace as part of their visit to Northern Ireland to attend the annual 'Meet the Buyer' workshops.

Representatives of the Davagh Dark Sky Observatory joined Tourism Ireland at the first promotion for 2020 in the Scottish market – the Celtic Connections workshop with travel trade held in Glasgow. In November 2019 representatives from the Davagh Dark Sky Observatory joined Tourism Ireland at the world's largest travel trade fair in London – World Travel

Market. This important event also saw the new tourism brand for Northern Ireland – ‘Embrace A Giant Spirit’ – launched to international media and travel trade.

In September 2019, Tourism Ireland invited top travel and food writers from Canada, with a combined audience of over 1.5 million readers to Northern Ireland. Their visit focused on tourism and food and included the Seamus Heaney HomePlace, Bakehouse in Bellaghy, Ardtara House and the Flax Visitor Centre in Upperlands.

In October 2019, representatives of the Ulster Historical Foundation, Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, Mid Ulster District Council, as well as historian Billy Kennedy, travelled to Georgia in the United States, to join Tourism Ireland for the annual Stone Mountain Highland Games.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the number of students from Northern Ireland undertaking undergraduate university courses in Great Britain in each of the last five years; (ii) the cost to the Northern Ireland Executive of funding these places in each of the last five years; and (iii) the cost to the Executive of non-repayment of student loans in each of the last five years.

(AQW 987/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) The number of students from Northern Ireland undertaking undergraduate university courses in Great Britain in each of the last five years

Year	Total Undergraduate Students in GB
2013/14	13,315
2014/15	12,945
2015/16	13,405
2016/17	14,025
2017/18	14,360

- (ii) The cost to the Northern Ireland Executive of funding these places in each of the last five years

These places are funded by way of tuition fee loans. Tuition fee loans are issued from AME Capital budgets and impairments are met through Ring-fenced DEL, and there is no direct cost to the Northern Ireland Executive's Resource DEL Block Grant of issuing student loans, or if applicable their write-off.

- (iii) The cost to the Executive of non-repayment of student loans in each of the last five years

These places are funded by way of tuition fee loans. Tuition fee loans are issued from AME Capital budgets and impairments are met through Ring-fenced DEL, and there is no direct cost to the Northern Ireland Executive's Resource DEL Block Grant of issuing student loans, or if applicable their write-off.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy for her assessment of the current roll out of 5G technology.

(AQW 1042/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department has no current plans to intervene in 5G rollout.

The rollout of 5G Services is a commercial matter for the privatised telecommunications providers.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for the Economy (i) for an update on the current work programme of Petroleum Licence PL1/10; (ii) what changes to the current work programme have been proposed by the licensees; and (iii) what changes to the current work programme have been agreed by her Department.

(AQW 1049/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: On 29 January 2020, the Administrator and Operator of Petroleum Licence PL1/10, Terrain Energy Limited, notified my Department that it intended to relinquish Petroleum Licence PL1/10 with immediate effect. In accordance with the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, Petroleum Licence PL1/10 will determine on 28 April 2020 following the required three-month notice period.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy how much funding her Department contributed, directly or indirectly, towards hosting The Open 2019 golf tournament.

(AQW 1116/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The 148th Open was secured for Royal Portrush Golf Club in 2014 following extensive negotiations with the event organisers, The R&A. This was very much a commercial negotiation and as such associated costs is commercially sensitive information subject to contractual confidentiality clauses.

Whilst regretfully I am not in a position to disclose the detail of all of the funding committed to hosting the event, I can assure you that investment represented excellent value for the public purse as Portrush delivered one of the most successful Open Championships on record, with a combined economic benefit to Northern Ireland in excess of £100m.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the conditions placed on Ulster University in relation to the proposed Heads of Terms for the provision of up to £126 million of Financial Transactions Capital, to bridge a funding gap in the Greater Belfast Development Project.

(AQW 1234/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The conditions within the draft Heads of Terms for the proposed provision of additional loan financing to Ulster University are commercially sensitive at this point. However, I have asked my officials to offer a briefing to the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Economy Committee on a commercial in confidence basis on this matter.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy what consideration her Department has given to develop or invest in additional renewable microgeneration capacity and to detail her views on the benefits of microgeneration.

(AQW 1436/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The future for renewable energy of all capacities, including any potential future targets and the need for new support schemes, will be considered as part of the development of a new Energy Strategy.

A Call for Evidence to inform the development of a new Energy Strategy was published on 17 December 2019 and runs to 20 March 2020.

Micro-generation helps to facilitate consumers to produce energy for their own consumption through low carbon technologies. In the case of electricity, this can also be exported to the grid for consumption by others.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister for the Economy whether paid bereavement leave will apply to agency workers.

(AQW 1471/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I have asked officials to bring forward, for my consideration, proposals for parental bereavement leave to be introduced in Northern Ireland. The associated policy is still in the early stages of development and I will want to seek views from interested parties in order to ensure we develop proposals which are balanced and proportionate.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether she has reviewed the 7th Report of the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into RHI and whether she accepts the recommendations.

(AQW 1501/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I am aware of the recommendations in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) report "Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive scheme payments". The work undertaken by DfE officials in response to these recommendations is in progress and includes:

A review by external consultants of the underlying costs of using biomass, and the impact on RHI tariffs;

The appointment of an independent chair to examine cases of hardship associated with RHI; and

Work towards the development of a Voluntary Buy-Out.

It should be noted that the NIAC report predates the New Decade, New Approach commitment in relation to the closure of the RHI scheme, and the recommendations of the report must therefore be considered in this new context. In working to deliver the New Decade, New Approach commitment, I will take account of all relevant information, including the NIAC report and recommendations.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Ms Bailey asked the Assembly Commission why an Independent Financial Review Panel has not been established since the end of the previous panel's tenure in July 2016; and when a new panel will be established.

(AQW 982/17-22)

Mrs D Kelly (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Independent Financial Review Panel ("IFRP") was established pursuant to the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (NI) 2011 ("the 2011 Act").

Under the 2011 Act, the IFRP is required to be independent and is not, in the exercise of its functions, subject to the direction or control of the Assembly or the Assembly Commission.

The Chair and two other Panel members are appointed by the Assembly Commission for a term of five years. The terms of office of persons appointed to the IFRP expired in July 2016.

The Assembly Commission considered a range of options for the reform of the IFRP during 2015 and early 2016, but agreed that the incoming Assembly Commission that would be appointed following the May 2016 Assembly elections, should itself consider the options.

Following initial consultation with Assembly Commission members during the summer of 2016, a comprehensive consultation document entitled "Independent Financial Review Panel: Reform" was issued to Assembly Commission Members on 28 October 2016, requesting an outline of their Party's views on the matters by 13 January 2017.

This work was overtaken by political events, namely that the Assembly did not resume normal business after the March 2017 election until 11 January 2020. The Assembly Commission was mindful that it was inappropriate for it to prioritise issues related to Members' salaries and allowances when the Assembly was not meeting. It was anticipated that this work would recommence once normal Assembly business resumed and a new Assembly Commission could be appointed.

In order to enable officials to undertake some preparatory work in advance of a potential return to normal Assembly business, at its meeting on 5 September 2019, the Assembly Commission asked officials to issue a fresh consultation document in order to seek the views of the Parties represented on the Assembly Commission and identify areas of agreement for possible reform of the IFRP. It was also agreed that following this, a wider consultation with all Members could take place.

A further consultation document was issued to Assembly Commission Members on 21 November 2019, requiring written responses from their Parties on the key issues outlined, by 17 January 2020. This deadline was extended to 7 February 2020 following appointment of the new Assembly Commission. The Speaker has also informed Assembly Commission Members that he would like to begin discussions at the first meeting of the new Assembly Commission on 19 February 2020, with a view to establishing a new IFRP as soon as possible.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 21 February 2020

Written Answers

The Executive Office

Ms S Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the face of the climate change emergency, to outline what actions or policies their Department will (i) take; or (ii) adopt, (a) immediately; (b) in the short term; and (c) in the longer term to help reduce carbon emissions.

(AQW 549/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We intend to publish details of the Executive's agreed approach to bringing forward a new Programme for Government shortly. It is envisaged that the Programme will take account of the priority areas identified in the New Decade, New Approach agreement including in relation to addressing the immediate and longer term impacts of climate change.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of (i) the practical consequences for north-south cooperation arising from New Decade, New Approach; and (ii) how will the same be manifested.

(AQW 798/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The relevant issues arising from New Decade, New Approach will likely be a matter for discussion at a future meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in accordance with the stranded approach of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In line with the statutory requirements, we will notify the Executive and Assembly of any future NSMC meetings, including the Agenda. A report will be made to the Assembly after each NSMC meeting.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the role of the Dublin Government in overseeing the implementation of New Decade, New Approach.

(AQW 799/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: We refer the Member to paragraph 6.2 of Annex F to Part 2 of the New Decade, New Approach Deal. This sets out the agreement to establish Implementation Review Meetings to review and monitor implementation and that Government involvement in these meetings will be in accordance with the three stranded approach.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the role of Executive Press Secretary still exists; and (ii) if so, to outline the recruitment process for the post.

(AQW 842/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: We have not discussed this matter.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on progress on the appointment process for (i) a Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse; and (ii) the multi-disciplinary members of the Redress Board.

(AQW 843/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The public appointment competition for a Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse (COSICA) will be launched very shortly with a view to the appointment being made as soon as possible. The interim Advocate – Brendan McAllister – will remain in post until the statutory Commissioner is appointed.

Two interim non-judicial panel members of the shadow HIA Redress Board have been appointed.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the final list of successful Social Investment Fund projects, broken down by (i) geographic area; (ii) capital versus revenue allocation; and (iii) whether the need identified was deprivation or dereliction.

(AQW 845/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: Projects being delivered through the Social Investment Fund are those based on identified need, prioritised by Steering Groups and which demonstrate value for money. Full details of these projects, including geographical investment zone and whether they are capital or revenue are available on the SIF website at the following link:

www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/social-investment-fund

These are updated regularly as projects reach key milestones or a stage requiring revised approval to proceed. All projects have identified need in accordance with the scheme's criteria under addressing deprivation with the following capital projects also tackling dereliction:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Childcare and Family Support Cluster | ■ St Comgalls |
| ■ Taughmonagh Healthy Living Centre | ■ West Lisburn Community Centre |
| ■ Bryson Street Surgery | ■ Castlewellan Community Centre |
| ■ Best of the East | ■ Community Capacity Hubs |
| ■ Walkway Community Centre | ■ Cothu |
| ■ Oak Centre Clararwood | ■ Invest in Play |
| ■ InaG | ■ Lanyon Tunnels |

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to repeal Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (Northern Ireland) 1998.

(AQW 874/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The exemption from The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 dealing with recruitment of teachers will be considered in due course, in consultation with the Department of Education.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline all formal communications between the Executive Office and the Department of Education regarding Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (Northern Ireland) 1998.

(AQW 875/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: Our officials met Department of Education officials in January 2016 and again in September 2016 to discuss this matter.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect to receive the final report from the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition.

(AQW 942/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The Commission has not yet completed its work and is due to meet again in March 2020. We would hope to receive the final report as soon as possible.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the status of the English language, as referred to in the draft Irish language legislation.

(AQW 975/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: Nothing in the draft Bill affects the status of the English Language.

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the timeframe for the introduction of historical institutional abuse compensation payments.

(AQW 1458/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: It is planned that the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Redress Board application process will be open to victims and survivors at the end of March 2020.

Redress Board multi-disciplinary panels will be available to sit from the end of April, with the first approved awards to follow shortly thereafter.

Work to deliver on these challenging timescales is proceeding at pace.

Mr McCrossan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline plans to reform (i) the Civil Service; and (ii) arm's-length bodies, as detailed in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQW 1811/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The "New Decade, New Approach" document contains a number of commitments aimed at rationalising public service services and making them more effective, including through reform of the Civil Service and a review of arms-length bodies.

This will require discussion at Executive level and we will provide an update in due course.

Mr Catney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a timeline for the development of the land at Maze/Long Kesh. (AQO 113/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: We recognise the potential of the site and hope to find a resolution that will see the site developed.

The timeline for development will depend very much on the detail of that resolution.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they plan to establish an Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee comprised of statutory committee chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to monitor and report on progress on Programme for Government outcomes.

(AQO 119/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: We note the recommendation in the "New Decade, New Approach" document to establish an Assembly Committee to monitor progress against Programme for Government outcomes and to consider potential measures for achieving improvement.

The establishment of new Committees is, of course, a matter for the Assembly, and we will provide whatever help might be required to ensure there is effective scrutiny of the Programme for Government.

A further recommendation in the New Decade, New approach document calls for the creation of a dedicated Programme for Government monitoring and reporting website which will allow for full and transparent public reporting. Work has already commenced on this important aspect and is progressing well.

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the draft report of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition will be progressed.

(AQO 123/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: Upon conclusion of its work, it is anticipated that the Commission will submit a final report to us for consideration.

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to review Arm's-Length Bodies.

(AQO 121/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The "New Decade, New Approach" document contains a number of commitments aimed at rationalising public service services and making them more effective, including through a review of arm's-length bodies.

This will require discussion at Executive level and we will update members in due course.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail her Department's budget, broken down by (i) major spending components; (ii) gross expenditure per component; and (iii) percentage share of spend for each component as a share of the total departmental spend, expressed in tabular form over the past five years.

(AQW 1432/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): As 2016-17 represented the first financial year of DAERA, only figures for three years are available.

Table 1 below shows the information requested broken down into the four major spending components of Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL), Depreciation/Impairment (D/I) DEL, Capital DEL and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME). The expenditure figures shown are inclusive of any income received by the Department.

Table 1

	2018-19			2017-18			2016-17		
	Budget	Outturn	Share of Spend	Budget	Outturn	Share of Spend	Budget	Outturn	Share of Spend
Component	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	%
Resource DEL	190.4	190.3	72.8%	164.7	164.6	77.9%	198.5	181.3	77.8%
D/I DEL	22.9	22.8	8.7%	19.4	19.3	9.1%	17.5	17.5	7.5%
Capital DEL	63.8	63.8	24.4%	38.9	35.8	16.9%	38.8	38.7	16.6%
AME	21.4	-15.5	-5.9%	22.9	-8.4	-4.0%	22.3	-4.4	-1.9%

	2018-19			2017-18			2016-17		
	Budget	Outturn	Share of Spend	Budget	Outturn	Share of Spend	Budget	Outturn	Share of Spend
Component	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	%
Total DEL + AME	298.5	261.4	100%	245.9	211.3	100%	277.1	233.1	100%

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what financial support his Department provided to businesses following the flooding in Londonderry in August 2017.

(AQW 1509/17-22)

Mr Poots: In terms of financial assistance following the flooding in the North West in 2017, DAERA took steps to make enhanced advance CAP payments at a rate of 70% to help to alleviate cash flow issues experienced by farmers. In addition, the Department approved force majeure declarations on affected farmland which had been submitted for Basic Payment Scheme support at the time, thus ensuring no reduction in those payments due to flood damage.

The Department has since provided £0.5 million of funding to the Loughs Agency to carry out remedial riparian fencing works in the worst affected areas. That repair work commenced in November 2019 and is ongoing. Under its statutory conservation and protection remit, the Loughs Agency continues to undertake work in the affected areas.

Under the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS), 41 farm businesses along the Glenelly and Owenkillew rivers are being supported to protect 19,600m of watercourses with fencing and riparian margins, with funding totalling £118K.

The Department has also provided a range of advisory and practical support to farmers in the areas affected and has met with local stakeholders in Plumbridge to discuss community needs.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether his Department plans to continue to fund the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme.

(AQW 1563/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department is delivering the Rural Business Development Grant Pilot Scheme in partnership with ten Local Councils with project investment to be completed by 31 March 2020. An evaluation of the pilot scheme will be required to determine if there is sufficient need to further roll out the Rural Business Development Grant Pilot Scheme in the future. The evaluation will commence later this year.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of the Government's decision not to impose import tariffs on eggs and egg products post-Brexit, to outline what measures will he take to ensure that current legislation will be safeguarded and the economic welfare of local producers protected.

(AQW 1609/17-22)

Mr Poots: The decision not to impose import tariffs on eggs and egg products post-Brexit was part of the UK Government's tariff policy for application in the event of a No-Deal exit from the EU. Now that the Withdrawal Agreement has been reached, the UK Government is consulting on a new tariff policy, to apply after the end of the transition period, to imports from all countries which do not have a Free Trade Agreement with the UK. It is important that this tariff policy and the negotiation of the future trading relationship between the UK and the EU and other countries take account of the needs of the egg sector. In particular, I will be emphasising: the need to maintain high welfare and environmental standards within the UK; that imports into the UK meet these standards, and that the competitiveness of the egg sector is maintained.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether his Department intends to bring forward legislation on post-import testing for bovine viral diarrhoea.

(AQW 1657/17-22)

Mr Poots: Under the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) Eradication Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Order), herd keepers are already required to carry out BVD tests on bovines that are moved or imported into Northern Ireland. The requirement applies to bovines born on or after 1 March 2016 that do not have a negative BVD virus test result from an approved laboratory.

Under Section 3(3) of the Order, a herd keeper of a bovine, born on, or after 1 March 2016, which does not possess a negative test result for BVD virus from an approved laboratory, has to ensure that a tissue or blood sample is taken from the bovine as soon as possible and in any event within 20 days of the bovine coming into the possession or control of the keeper. The tissue sample must be dispatched to an approved laboratory within 7 days of taking the sample for testing for BVD virus.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the NI Environmental Agency review of its planning operational policy on ammonia.

(AQW 1659/17-22)

Mr Poots: I am aware of the importance of the review of the operational protocol on ammonia. The review is at an advanced stage. I will be carefully considering the findings of the review and will make a decision on the way forward in the near future.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to a statement in the public consultation on the draft Environment Strategy, that the designation of protected areas for biodiversity and habitat protection was 'complete', to detail (i) a definition of this; and (ii) against what benchmark is the designation of protected sites deemed complete.

(AQW 1683/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Environment Strategy public discussion document includes the phrase "designation of protected sites is largely complete" reflecting the progress made since the last major review of the terrestrial designated site network in 2006. There are additional sites still to designate and a review of the sufficiency of the network is planned which will inform a future programme.

With respect to the marine protected network, a review in 2018 concluded that the current suite of sites is "very close" to delivering an ecologically coherent network in Northern Ireland.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussion his Department has had with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council regarding a proposed new entrance to Hillsborough Forest.

(AQW 1707/17-22)

Mr Poots: Officials from my Department and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council have had initial discussions about a range of options for a potential new entrance to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) site at Hillsborough. I am conscious that access to the AFBI site is currently shared with the Forest Park entrance and that is being considered as part of discussions with the Council.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, regarding the change in rules regarding ammonia emissions from slurry tanks, to detail (i) what consultation was carried out with the industry; and (ii) what assessment has been made of the impact it is likely to have on farmers setting up a business.

(AQW 1713/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Department has not made any change to rules regarding ammonia emissions or to its advice to planning authorities on assessing the impacts of on emissions from agricultural development. However, in light of recent case law and emerging evidence, my officials are currently undertaking a review of the operational protocol for such advice. I recognise the importance of clarity on this issue for the agriculture sector and planning authorities and will ensure that this work progresses in a timely manner. It is in everyone's interest to address environmental concerns while allowing sustainable agricultural development.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the number of times; and (ii) what species of fish that has been stocked in Hillsborough Lake, broken down by year from 2010.

(AQW 1727/17-22)

Mr Poots:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Rainbow Trout	5,000	5,000	5,300	4,550	6,500	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	4,000	1,000
No. of stockings	7	7	5	6	7	5	4	5	5	4	1
Brown Trout											1,000*
No. of stockings											1

* There was a mechanical issue with the transportation equipment for the original destination regarding the stocking on the 7th of January 2020. Due to fish welfare it was decided to redirect this stocking to the closest DAERA Public Angling Estate water which was Hillsborough Lake

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) what are the cost recovery powers contained in the incoming Fisheries Bill; and (ii) in what circumstances they might be used.

(AQW 1739/17-22)

Mr Poots: Paragraph 3 of Schedule 7 to the Fisheries Bill provides a power to make regulations to allow it to charge for certain marine functions. These marine functions are specified as those relating to fishing quotas, ensuring lawful commercial fishing activities, the registration of buyers and sellers of first-sale fish, and catch certificates for the import and export of fish.

This power would be available to the Department if in future it is thought appropriate to seek cost recovery from the fishing and seafood sectors. Checking of catch certificates for third country imports of fish products is currently charged by Port Health Authorities.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the schemes due to be introduced as part of the Fisheries Bill to replace funding from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and other European Union sources.

(AQW 1740/17-22)

Mr Poots: Work has commenced to replace the current European Maritime and Fisheries Fund with a future fund, subject to a Strategic Outline Case being approved by the Department of Finance. Schedule 6 Paragraph 3.1 of The Fisheries Bill includes powers for my Department to deliver a future fund through the establishment of a scheme of financial assistance which would be subject to affirmative resolution by the Assembly.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he can guarantee that all European funding, from sources such as the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, will be replaced by schemes included in the Fisheries Bill.

(AQW 1741/17-22)

Mr Poots: While Schedule 6 Paragraph 3.1 of The Fisheries Bill includes powers to establish schemes to replace the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, I cannot, at this time, give a guarantee that the scope or scale of future funding measures will be exactly the same as that available under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. However, I am confident that the case for future support can be made. My officials are currently developing a strategic outline case for a programme of support to replace the present European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Programme.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, given the importance of traceability and identification to the agri-food industry, whether he is satisfied that the AFHIS system is fit for purpose.

(AQW 1746/17-22)

Mr Poots: APHIS went live in 1998 and has been subject to regular approvals, audits and accreditations from the EU and others throughout its operational life.

APHIS remains fit for purpose and continues to provide a reliable, resilient and highly available platform for the delivery of traceability, animal health, food safety, market access and export and consumer assurance across the main food animal species.

The servers upon which the system resides have recently been replaced, with an expected five-year life-span, and the database is currently being upgraded. The Department has also been assured by AMT-Sybex that the operating system, database engine and software will remain in support till at least the early 2020's, and that the APHIS contract is open-ended.

The APHIS system's management information and reporting tools are also currently undergoing re-engineering by the Department onto a new platform (SQL) to ensure their on-going operation and support into the future.

The Aphis-on-Line interface used by livestock farmers to register cattle births, deaths and movements, sheep inventories, etc has recently been upgraded to improve its usability, with further enhancements due later in 2020. These will ensure its continued efficient operability and performance into the future on modern mobile devices.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of the effectiveness of the independent environment agencies in (i) Britain; and (ii) Republic of Ireland, in environmental improvement.

(AQW 1747/17-22)

Mr Poots: I have not carried out an assessment of the effectiveness of the independent environment agencies in Britain or the Republic of Ireland, in environmental improvement.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on (i) the scale of Brexit-related pressures on staffing; and (ii) European Union replacement funding, within his Department.

(AQW 1748/17-22)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The Department currently has 253 staff working in Brexit related posts. We have assessed our need as slightly over 400 and there is steady progress in filling these posts. This will be kept under review.
- (ii) **Following the passage of the necessary legislation by Parliament, I recently confirmed that the arrangements for £293million in Direct Payments for the 2020 scheme year are now in place.**

In relation to future years, the Conservative Party manifesto stated that funding for farm support would be maintained at existing levels until the end of this Parliament.

With regards to the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, projects will continue to receive funding for the lifetime of the project, in line with letters of offer. This includes agreements issued until 31 December 2020, subject to individual scheme application windows and deadlines.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, given that some local councils are removing glyphosate, for his assessment on his Department's use of it for the removal of weeds.
(AQW 1756/17-22)

Mr Poots: Glyphosate is widely used as a herbicide across Northern Ireland for the control of weeds and invasive plant species.

All plant protection products that are approved for use in Northern Ireland have undergone a two-step authorisation procedure at European and UK level. This procedure includes a rigorous assessment of safety and any risks to human health and the environment. All approvals are also subject to periodic review.

On 28 November 2017 the EU re-approved the continuing use of glyphosate following reviews of the scientific data by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency's Committee for Risk Assessment. They found no safety concerns that would prevent continuing approval. The current EU approval lasts until 15 December 2022; use beyond that date would be subject to a further decision.

The UK Health and Safety Executive's Chemicals Regulation Division (CRD), is responsible for UK approvals. CRD agree with the EU assessment and approved the continued use of glyphosate in the UK.

Therefore, as glyphosate satisfies the regulatory standards for the protection of health and the environment, my Department uses it as an effective herbicide for broad-spectrum control of weeds and invasive plant species.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when will the current policy on nitrogen deposition regarding intensive livestock be brought in line with the legal requirements of the (i) EU Habitats Directive; and (ii) the policies of other authorities such as Shared Environmental Services.
(AQW 1787/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Department's operational protocol for assessment of air pollution, including nitrogen deposition, is currently under review. The review was initiated in light of recent EU and UK case law and scientific evidence. I recognise its importance for both the protection of the environment and the need for sustainable growth in the NI economy. Shared Environmental Services is independent of the Department. In undertaking its own review, the Department are aware of Shared Environmental Services' guidance. I will be carefully considering the findings of the Department's review.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs why a precautionary moratorium on new or expanded intensive livestock units has not been implemented following the emergence of a new SARS-like pandemic.
(AQW 1789/17-22)

Mr Poots: There is currently no evidence that any species of farm livestock kept for food was involved in the origin or transmission in China to humans of the Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) virus.

There is currently no evidence that the Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is capable of infecting the types of food animal livestock farmed in Northern Ireland.

We will of course constantly review the situation in the light of new evidence, both in the UK and internationally, but on the basis of what we currently know, it would be premature to bring in restrictions on the set-up or operation of farm livestock units of any size in Northern Ireland.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what has been the cost, to date, on developing the new Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System.
(AQW 1795/17-22)

Mr Poots: Expenditure on developing the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System from its commencement in 2011 up to 31 December 2019 is £16.1m

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) what action he will take to ensure the apple industry will not be negatively impacted by the decision to stop apple production research; and (ii) whether he will consider funding for the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute to restart research at the centre for apple growing in Loughgall.
(AQW 1796/17-22)

Mr Poots: Although DAERA has not commissioned new apple production research since 2016, my Department is offering support to the apple sector in a range of other ways aimed at improving the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector.

DAERA, through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), is working closely with the apple industry in the delivery of industry training, knowledge and technology transfer and benchmarking programmes to meet its needs. This

support ensures that research findings from the UK and elsewhere is disseminated to top-fruit growers primarily through two top-fruit Business Development Groups, but also through other industry training events and contacts.

CAFRE's Loughry Campus also helps the top-fruit industry by providing technical support, advice and training related to the processing and packaging of apples and apple products.

My Department will consider funding proposals from AFBI for apple research that are compatible with AFBI's forward business plans, but at this stage there are no plans for new apple production research projects. The principle behind AFBI's 2020 Strategy, shrink to grow, has focussed work in areas where AFBI can provide scientific excellence to DAERA and the local agri-food industry. In line with this, AFBI's ongoing science which supports the apple industry, includes food research, entomology and plant health (including apple scab monitoring in conjunction with CAFRE).

Finally, over the longer-term I will consider recommendations from work which has recently commenced on the development of a new DAERA research and development strategy. Expected to be completed at the end of this year, this strategy will set the future DAERA research agenda for all of our agricultural sectors.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of the Assembly's declaration of a climate emergency and adherence to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change emissions reduction targets, whether he will commit to opposing the proposed gas storage expansion project at Islandmagee.

(AQW 1843/17-22)

Mr Poots: As DAERA Minister it will be my duty to consider granting a marine licence for the proposed gas storage project at Islandmagee. In determining the application for the marine licence (including the terms on which it is to be granted and what conditions, if any, are to be attached to it), I will have regard to:-

- 1 The need to protect the environment;
- 2 The need to protect human health, and
- 3 The need to prevent interference with legitimate uses of the sea, and such other matters as my Department thinks relevant.

The extensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and documentation to support this application and views of the general public will inform the determination. It is important to note that this project was issued a draft marine licence in 2014 and the developer has updated its application and supporting documents in order to address environmental considerations such as recently designated marine protected areas.

A marine licence will only be granted if I am satisfied the three criteria listed above are met and it is in accordance with the UK Marine Policy Statement, which includes policies on Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation and Energy Production and Infrastructure Development. The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland is also a material consideration in this decision.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 1384/17-22, to list the objective criteria upon which Ministerial decisions pertaining to the award or withholding of consent for marine construction licences for Islandmagee Energy Ltd will be made.

(AQW 1869/17-22)

Mr Poots: As DAERA Minister it will be my duty to consider granting a marine licence for the proposed gas storage project at Islandmagee under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. In determining the application for the marine licence including the terms on which it is to be granted and what conditions, if any, are to be attached to it, I will have regard to:

- 4 The need to protect the environment,
- 5 The need to protect human health
- 6 The need to prevent interference with legitimate uses of the sea, and such other matters as my Department thinks relevant

The Environmental Impact Statement, supporting documentation, views of the general public, conservation groups and stakeholders including other sea users will inform the determination. DAERA must have regard to any representations which it receives from any person having an interest in the outcome of the application.

It is important to note that this project was granted a draft marine licence in 2014 and the developer is updating the application in order to address environmental considerations such as Marine Protected Areas in the vicinity which have been designated post award of the 2014 draft marine licence.

A marine licence will only be granted if I am satisfied the three criteria listed above are met and it is in accordance with the UK Marine Policy Statement, which includes policies on Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation and Energy Production and Infrastructure Development. The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland is also a material consideration in this decision.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to the Farm Innovation Scheme, for his assessment on the rationale of the criteria that a farm business should have reared at least 25 heifer replacements per year in the last 2 years.

(AQW 1874/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Farm Innovation Visits (FIV) Scheme is funded under the Rural Development Programme and is delivered by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). A study tour is planned for 25 and 26 February 2020 which offers dairy farmers the opportunity to travel to England to learn about innovative heifer rearing practices.

The host farms for this tour are large dairy units or contract rearers rearing in excess of 100 heifers per year and CAFRE judged that, for this tour, it would be appropriate to target this FIV to herds of average and above size. I acknowledge that unit size is no reflection on performance but in this case CAFRE judged that it was preferable to match the scale of participant enterprise to the hosts for this tour.

Further heifer rearing Farm Innovation Visits will take place and CAFRE will take into account smaller to average milk producers interested in improving their skills and knowledge when planning them.

In the meantime the participants in the current FIV have indicated that they will be disseminating their findings to 34 groups and this will provide an opportunity for a wide range of milk producers to avail of the information gained.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 1534/17-22, to outline (i) when his Department will be launching a public consultation on the Deposit Return Scheme; (ii) the remit of the consultation; and (iii) whether the consultation will be in conjunction with any further consultation in England and Wales.

(AQW 1913/17-22)

Mr Poots: The previous answer to AQW 1534/17-22 refers.

A public consultation is planned to launch alongside England and Wales in autumn 2020. The remit of the consultation will be the specific details of a DRS, including the material and drinks to be included in scope.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs why anaerobic digesters are exempted from requiring a Waste Management License or a Pollution Prevention and Control Permit.

(AQW 1936/17-22)

Mr Poots: Any Anaerobic Digestion (AD) plant that accepts waste inputs into the process, requires a waste authorisation from DAERA. The authorisation required is either a Waste Management Licence or a PPC Permit depending on the nature and quantity of waste inputs.

AD plants that operate on non-waste feedstocks only, e.g. energy crops, do not require a waste authorisation.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether provisions consulted on in the Environment Bill on behalf of his Department will apply in Northern Ireland, including a proposed (i) Deposit Return Scheme; and (ii) Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme.

(AQW 1978/17-22)

Mr Poots: Subject to the Assembly granting legislative consent, the Environment Bill will extend to Northern Ireland in respect of a range of environmental matters, including Deposit Return and Extended Producer Responsibility Schemes.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 672/17-22, whether he will consider prioritising those applications where the applicant proposes to plant trees, given the seasonal nature of this.

(AQW 2112/17-22)

Mr Poots: I am conscious of seasonality issues with tree planting. Therefore, offers of agreement which contain the 'Establishment of Native Woodland' option will be among the first to be issued, when offers to Environmental Farming Scheme Tranche 3 applicants start to issue. The issue of agreements will be subject to the current review of the business case for the Environmental Farming Scheme (which is well advanced) and the associated approvals.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what action is being taken to protect our local rivers and waterways from pollution.

(AQO 141/17-22)

Mr Poots: There are a wide range of measures being progressed by my Department, as well as a number of further actions which we undertake in partnership with others, to protect our rivers and waterways from pollution.

My Department carries out regular and detailed monitoring, sampling and analysis of our aquatic environment. This work provides an assessment of the water quality and can be used to inform measures within catchments to address any issues. NIEA also operate a 24 hour, 365 days a year response capability should pollution incidents be reported.

My Department regulate discharges to rivers and lakes, setting quality standards which ensure the receiving waterway can absorb the discharge without damaging the aquatic environment. With regards to the risk posed from agricultural sources,

my Department, through CAFRE, has been working with the sector to raise awareness of preventative measures. NIEA also undertake agricultural inspections under the Nutrients Action Programme Regulations which is a key measure to prevent pollution issues emanating from farms. These Regulations have recently been further strengthened following a review.

My Department works closely with Northern Ireland Water on their price control process helping to ensure that investment is targeted to prevent pollution and improve water quality. NIEA also apply a risk based approach to the regulation of discharges, sampling the effluent quality and taking enforcement action where there is a risk to the aquatic environment. DAERA is currently consulting on the Significant Water Management Issues report which is open for responses until 22 June 2020.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans his Department has to implement a successor to the Priority 6 LEADER delivery mechanism of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQO 143/17-22)

Mr Poots: Priority 6 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 or the 'promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development' priority, is currently delivered through the 'LEADER' or 'bottom-up' methodology and provides £70m to support rural businesses and job creation; rural community services and village renewal; and, support for connectivity and co-operation. A further £10m is available to support rural tourism.

My officials have been working to develop a New Rural Policy Framework for NI that would inform the need for a successor rural programme once the current programme ends. This Framework will be set within the context of alignment with the Draft Programme for Government; the impact of the removal of the EU Rural Development policy and programme; Community Planning and what is needed to support the sustainability of our rural communities.

Following extensive engagement with rural stakeholders, my officials developed five draft 'Priority Goals' for consideration in a rural policy framework. Five working groups have taken forward further exploration and development of these goals over the last eight months to identify the need and evidence for any future policy or programme intervention. This work was recently endorsed by stakeholders at an engagement event attended by over 120 delegates on the 16th January in Loughry College.

My officials will now seek to develop the overarching Rural Policy Framework document and subject to further scrutiny by the AERA committee and my approval, I plan that the draft framework will go out for full public consultation later this year.

Implementation of at least 5% of the NI RDP 2014-2020 (c£525m) through the 'LEADER' methodology is an EU requirement and just over 13% (£70m) of the current programme is delivered by 'LEADER'. You will appreciate that, although I am very pleased with the work taken forward to date to plan for a future rural policy, it is much too early to provide any clarity around how any future interventions will be delivered.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans he has to help farmers with reseeding, improving soil structure and grassland management.

(AQO 144/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department's College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) provides a range of knowledge transfer programmes to help farmers and those who work in the land-based industries develop new technical and practical skills. There are currently over 2700 farmers in 143 Business Development Groups (BDGs) across all agriculture sectors. Reseeding, improving soil management and grassland management are key topics addressed through peer learning at these training events.

Technical training in topics, such as soil and grassland management, are also delivered through the Farm Family Key Skills Scheme (FFKS), Farm Innovation Visits (FIVs) and Technology Demonstration Farms (TDFs). Both FIVs and TDFs provide farmers with the opportunity to learn about new and innovative technologies in the EU, UK and Northern Ireland.

Grassland management is also embedded in the various further and higher agriculture education courses delivered by CAFRE on which 630 students are currently enrolled. Many of these students return to their home farms on completion of their qualification where they can apply the knowledge and skills gained.

CAFRE also have a suite of online decision programmes to assist farmers in grassland management by improving soil fertility, grass and crop yields - making savings on chemical fertiliser whilst improving water quality. There have been over 10,000 users of these programmes since 2015.

CAFRE also plans to assist farmers by demonstrating to the farming industry new soil and grassland technologies on the CAFRE farm to encourage adoption of innovative practices.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when he will bring forward a clean air strategy for public consultation.

(AQO 145/17-22)

Mr Poots: Air pollution can have a serious effect on people's health. It also has negative impacts on our environment.

In December 2016, the previous DAERA Minister, Michele McIlveen, gave a commitment to develop an air quality strategy. Since then, the Department has been working on developing a draft Clean Air Strategy. This work involves close collaboration with other Departments and officials continue to work together to finalise the draft discussion document on the Clean Air Strategy.

Once the draft discussion document is complete, I will consider the options for issuing the draft Clean Air Strategy for public consultation later in the year.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what plans his Department has for maintaining and extending coastal defences.

(AQO 146/17-22)

Mr Poots: The recent storms have reminded us again of the devastating effect that coastal erosion and flooding can have on vulnerable communities and infrastructure. Indeed, climate change risk assessments have identified that coastal erosion may be exacerbated by rising sea levels, higher wave heights and more extreme storm surge events.

There is currently no legislation in relation to coastal erosion risk management in Northern Ireland and coastal defence is governed by the Bateman formula dating from 1967.

While my Department is responsible for licensing the construction of coastal defences under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the provision of conservation advice, it does not have any specific responsibility for the maintenance or extension of coastal defences.

It must be noted that coastal change is a natural process, so it is going to continue. Coastal defences can prevent the natural adjustment of coastal systems to rising sea levels whereas natural coastal habitats such as saltmarsh provide protection from coastal flooding and storm surges.

It is widely accepted that the Bateman formula is no longer fit for purpose and the Coastal Forum has provided an excellent opportunity to develop a collaborative approach to resolving this issue. Through this mechanism my Department is collaborating with DfI, local councils and the National Trust to improve the evidence base for coastal management decision making, which will inform the development of future policy options.

I look forward to having the opportunity to consider recommendations from the Coastal Forum with my Executive colleagues.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs following the agreement to a regulatory border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, what discussions he has had with Her Majesty's Government and European Union officials about animal and food regulations, and their enforcement, for products moving from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQO 147/17-22)

Mr Poots: I have just met with portfolio Ministers from across the four UK Administrations at the Inter-Ministerial group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and raised the key issues in relation to the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol and the impact on NI/GB product movements and the enforcement of regulations.

I also had a bilateral meeting, just today, with the Defra Secretary of State to understand further their position in relation to all of this.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how his Department intends to reduce pollution and improve air quality in urban areas.

(AQO 149/17-22)

Mr Poots: Air quality in Northern Ireland has improved in respect of some air pollutants, for example, airborne lead and sulphur dioxide.

Recognising that more can be done, my Department supports District Councils with funding for air quality monitoring and the development of action plans to address local air quality issues across Northern Ireland.

My Department approves clean-burning appliances and low-smoke fuels for use in Smoke Control Areas, to reduce pollution from domestic chimneys.

Since 2016, my Department has been developing a draft Clean Air Strategy. This has involved close collaboration with other Departments and officials continue to work together to finalise the draft discussion document on the Clean Air Strategy. Once the draft discussion document is complete, I will consider the options for issuing the draft Clean Air Strategy for public consultation later in the year.

Behavioural change is also at the forefront of my Departments work. DAERA supports Sustrans, an active travel charity, which works to change attitudes and promote active travel such as walking and cycling. My Department also ran a MyNI environmental education campaign on social media in late 2019 to encourage positive behavioural change.

Department for Communities

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities for a detailed breakdown of the projected £33 million overspend on the redevelopment of Casement Park, as highlighted by the recent Audit Office report.

(AQW 360/17-22)

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities): The Casement Park Stadium is the final project of the Regional Stadia Programme with both the Kingspan Stadium (UBIRFU) and the Windsor Park Stadium (IFA) now delivering benefits in their operational phases.

The Department has been allocated £110m by the Executive to deliver the Regional Stadia Programme, which includes £62.5million towards the redevelopment of Casement Park. The Casement Park approved overall project budget remains £77.5million.

The UCGAA Full Business Case identifies project cost estimate increases in the region of £33million in the following cost categories:

- Construction inflation impact;
- Stadium redesign impact; and
- Project development costs related to repeated design stages.

The current project cost estimate will be subject to change, with the passage of time and/or the implementation of the agreed construction procurement strategy.

Advancement of plans to complete the Regional Stadia Programme including Casement Park is set out as a priority of the restored Executive within the “New Decade, New Approach” agreement and I am fully committed to delivering on this priority area.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Communities, in the face of the climate change emergency, to outline what actions or policies her Department will (i) take; or (ii) adopt, (a) immediately; (b) in the short term; and (c) in the longer term to help reduce carbon emissions.

(AQW 362/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I recognise the profound challenges that climate change creates for us all, and the need for urgent and resolute responses to the issue. My Department has responsibility for a number of policy areas which impact and are impacted by climate change, and we are members of the Future Generations Group chaired by DAERA.

The Department’s Management Board considered the various issues at its meeting in October 2019, and set up a group to assess the actions needed in the short and longer term, to report back to the Board in April 2020. The Housing Executive has also set up a senior group to assess and progress the response that it needs to make. With this further assessment of the required actions and the feasible timeframe for each of them, in this answer I set out my Department’s current position and plans, as well as actions we have already taken, across a range of Departmental responsibilities.

The work shows that my Department recognises that it has an educative and influencing role to play in supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as the specific areas set out that we need to address. The work currently underway will articulate a more specific plan, including more specific timeframes, to address the various matters covered in this response.

Housing

My Department has responsibility for housing policy, including funding social and affordable housing. With domestic properties accounting for 13% of all carbon emissions, and with a greater proportion of NI’s homes being detached homes than in the rest of UK, we recognise the challenges that this creates. The fact that 80% of our housing stock in 2050 has already been built creates the potential for significant retro-fitting being needed to address carbon emission issues.

In the immediate term, the Housing Executive is currently replacing coal and electric heating systems with oil or gas central heating; installing double glazing; and topping up loft insulation. It has secured funding from European Regional Development Fund to apply external wall insulation to non-standard, uninsulated older homes to save more energy and to improve thermal comfort.

In the short-term we need to address the tension – with finite budgets – between the need to have more homes, and the need to fit them to a specification that addresses carbon emission issues. We will also need to consider the extent to which we are able to incentivise higher standards of energy performance, and the interaction of this priority with our essential work to reduce fuel poverty. In all of this we will work closely with DoF which has responsibility for Building Control regulations.

Historic Environment

My Department has policy lead for historic environment matters. Older buildings and monuments face particular challenges from climate change, due in part to the age of the structures and the materials in which they were constructed. The Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate sets out 12 principles which the Executive committed to in the care of its assets; these include one on climate change.

In the immediate term, my Department is responsible for compiling a biennial report on actions arising from the Protocol, and will prepare the next report during 2020.

In the short-term, we also need to consider climate change issues when considering the conservation regime for our State Care Monuments, and our grant programmes for the historic environment.

Property Management

In respect of the office estate that we occupy, my Department has already taken considerable steps over the last ten years to help reduce carbon emissions. Under the Carbon Reduction Scheme, which reported from April 2010 to April 2019, my Department achieved a total reduction in CO2 emissions per tonne of more than 35% through encouraging behavioural

change by staff, replacing outdated plant and by reducing its building footprint. From April 2019 my Department has adopted the NICS Energy Management Strategy and Action Plan and is committed to achieving a further 30% reduction in net energy consumption across its estate by 2030. My Department is working closely with DoF Energy Unit and will continue to invest in technology like LED lighting and boiler conversion to gas where opportunities arise to help achieve this target.

Although my Department generally occupies buildings which are owned or leased by the Department of Finance, some of my Department's Arm's Length Bodies – particularly National Museums NI and Libraries NI – have significant estate and will need in the short-term to consider and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Urban Regeneration

Urban areas are the centres of innovation and growth, and the engines of economic development. In Europe, they host around 75% of the population and use about 80% of the energy produced, with an expected increasing trend. They are major contributors to climate change, generating significant greenhouse gas emissions. In terms of its urban regeneration responsibilities, my Department has already made some contributions in the transition to a low-carbon economy, for instance:

- By achieving CEEQUAL accreditation for public realm schemes. CEEQUAL is the Civil Engineering etc equivalent of BREEAM (which applies to buildings), and it takes into account a number of measures of environmental sustainability, including carbon emissions;
- By planting of trees and soft landscaping in town and city streets;
- By creating better infrastructure to support walking and cycling;
- By developing mixed-use schemes for town and city centres that include residential elements and so reduce the need for commuting.

We will need to continue in the short- and longer-term to build on these interventions to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities whether she has any plans to change her ministerial car to one which is powered by electricity or any other non-fossil fuel.

(AQW 369/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department does not currently have any plans to change the Ministerial car, however, I would be keen for the Department to consider all options, including vehicles powered by electric or alternative fuel, when the current vehicle comes to the end of its service life.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of (a) social; and (b) affordable housing new builds in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency; and (ii) whether her Department achieved its new build target in each of the corresponding years.

(AQW 419/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

(i) (a) social

Parliamentary Constituency	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units
East Antrim	32	48	24	68	44
North Antrim	10	136	219	188	165
South Antrim	69	20	88	32	56
Upper Bann	9	40	28	1	17
East Belfast	40	80	104	59	127
North Belfast	144	226	149	217	90
South Belfast	32	31	74	17	92
West Belfast	268	241	69	242	146
North Down	180	277	154	4	47
South Down	32	69	22	125	26
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	65	23	3	58	73
Foyle	566	88	349	445	584
Lagan Valley	195	36	106	105	119
East Londonderry	85	81	79	19	13

Parliamentary Constituency	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units
Mid Ulster	99	37	33	29	12
Newry & Armagh	14	6	60	131	71
Strangford	156	126	28	5	88
West Tyrone	17	3	15	14	16
Total	2013	1568	1604	1759	1786

(i) (b) affordable (intermediate)

Parliamentary Constituency	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units
East Antrim					
North Antrim					
South Antrim					
Upper Bann					
East Belfast		13			5
North Belfast					
South Belfast					
West Belfast					
North Down					
South Down					
Fermanagh & South Tyrone					
Foyle					
Lagan Valley					
East Londonderry					
Mid Ulster	2				
Newry & Armagh					
Strangford					
West Tyrone					
Total					

(ii) The social housing new build programme achieved its target in four of the last five years. Whilst the target of 1,850 was not achieved in 2018/19 the attainment of 1,789 new units was still an increase on the previous year's target.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities when she plans to bring forward devolution of regeneration powers to local councils. (AQW 448/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My predecessor, Paul Givan MLA, decided against progressing this in the previous mandate. This is something the Department is considering and will be engaging with key stakeholders in due course.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities to detail the revised plan in relation to the application to develop Casement Park. (AQW 546/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In March 2011 the Executive endorsed a Regional Stadia Programme with an overall programme budget of circa £130million that included an Executive grant funding commitment of £110million. The Kingspan Stadium (UBIRFU) and the Windsor Park Stadium (IFA) are complete and are delivering benefits in their operational phases. The Casement Park Stadium (UCGAA) will be the final project of the Regional Stadia Programme.

Advancement of plans to complete the Regional Stadia Programme including Casement Park is set out as a priority of the restored Executive within the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement and I am fully committed to delivering on this priority area.

The immediate next steps to advance with plans to complete the Casement Park Stadium include:

- Complete my review of the revised UCGAA draft Full Business Case (FBC);
- Share the FBC with Department of Finance economists for their review and receive their comments, for integration into the documents;
- Engage with the Minister for Infrastructure, to ensure that she has received all required information to support her decision on the Planning Application;
- If Planning Permission is received by UCGAA, and when all subsequent Planning matters have been resolved, make a decision on the approval of the final UCGAA FBC, containing accurate cost estimates;
- Submit a request to increase the Casement Park Project budget to the Executive for approval;
- In the event that the Executive approve the budget increase, my officials will ensure that the UCGAA Project Team have observed all conditions of their revised Funding Agreement with the Department, prior to finalisation of any UCGAA contractual commitments;
- My officials will then support the UCGAA Project Team in progressing to construction commencement.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities what actions her Department is taking to address housing insecurity. (AQW 657/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Charity Commission of Northern Ireland (CCNI) Registration Timescale

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities what is the average length of time from when an organisation completes its Registration of Interest with The Charity Commission of Northern Ireland (CCNI) until it receives a decision on its registration. (AQW 855/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Charity Commission does not hold information in a way which would readily allow the average time taken from submission of an Expression of Intent to registration to be calculated. This is due to a range of factors, including the complexity of the case and the volume of cases in progress at that point in time. A complicating factor is the McBride Judgment of 2019, as a result of which the Charity Commission is currently operating a Committee to make emergency decisions. My officials are working with the Charity Commission to explore the implications of this Judgment and I have asked them to consider options for any necessary changes to future operations, including the registration process.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the proposals on sub-regional stadia for soccer. (AQW 856/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer is one of the commitments in the “New Decade, New Approach” Agreement

Further work needs to be done to inform the development of detailed plans and that must involve the key stakeholders who oversee the game, operate the facilities, support football and play the sport at all levels.

To this end, I have asked my officials to take forward work to engage with and seek the views of the football sector and the key strategic stakeholders. Once this engagement has been completed, I will then consider proposals to take the Programme forward.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what (i) enforcement powers; and (ii) support exists to bring an empty home back into use. (AQW 882/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) Under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 and the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 the Housing Executive has the power to issue compulsory purchase orders to acquire property.
- (ii) Comprehensive advice and details of support available in dealing with Empty Homes can be found on the Empty Homes section of the Housing Executive website.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities for an update on progress on the reintroduction of the Cultra Hill Climb motorsport event at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. (AQW 919/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Cultra Hill Climb motorsport event is organised by the Thoroughbred Sports Car Club NI and was last held at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum site in 2017. I understand that discussions are ongoing between the organisers of this event and National Museums NI to explore the feasibility of holding the event at the site in future.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the action her Department is taking to increase areas of green space and public parks in West Tyrone.

(AQW 953/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The provision of parks and open spaces is primarily the responsibility of local councils.

My Department's actions in relation to public spaces are delivered through its urban regeneration remit by improving the public realm of our town and city centres, creating attractive, safe and sustainable places for people to live in, work and visit.

In addition, as the Accountable Department for the Shared Spaces Action of the PEACE IV Programme, my Department provides support to projects which have a green and public space element to them. The Riverine Community Park Project in Strabane/Lifford is a current example.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of social housing new builds planned under New Decade, New Approach.

(AQW 956/17-22)

Ms Hargey: New Decade, New Approach committed the NI Executive to "enhanced investment in new social home starts". In the first instance, the budget priorities of the Executive for 20/21 and beyond will set out this commitment in more detail. Clearly these priorities will reflect the Executive's commitment to increase investment above current levels. In 19/20, £146m is being invested against a target of 1850 new social housing starts.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Communities what plans she has to deal with legislation on the private rented sector.

(AQW 961/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Housing, and in particular the role and regulation of the Private Rented Sector, is one of my priorities. My Department's consultation exercise on proposals for change to the role and regulation of the private rented sector ended on 3 April 2017. The Department is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector to ensure the regulatory framework and supporting policy improve standards for the benefit of both tenants and landlords. The areas being reviewed include:

- Supply
- Affordability
- Security of tenure
- Tenancy management
- Property standards
- Dispute resolution

I am considering how to take forward the recommendations in that review, and what other measures may be necessary.

The review will inform future legislative proposals for consideration and will also include consideration of regulation of letting agents, including if further legislation is required to prevent letting agents charging tenants unfair fees.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department intends to allow housing associations greater enforcement powers against problem tenants.

(AQW 994/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is committed to tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) and ensuring that all social housing tenants are treated fairly and consistently.

All Registered Housing Associations must have in place policies and procedures for dealing with ASB, and must ensure that these are published and made available to tenants and customers.

A range of interventions are available to Housing Associations to address ASB at all levels. These range from floating support and mediation, to injunctions and possession proceedings.

Where the behaviour constitutes criminal activity, this is a matter for the Police and, ultimately, the Courts to address.

I fully support Housing Associations in utilising the range of tools available to them to address ASB and I urge them to use these interventions to their fullest extent as appropriate.

The consultation on the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations included two proposals for changes to legislation on ASB, firstly, regarding the Housing Executive's decisions on eligibility for social housing or for homelessness status, and secondly regarding when a person may be treated as ineligible for homelessness status. I will consider the Review and possible next steps.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities how her Department intends to deal with Part 11 of the Charities Act 2011 to enable the formation of Charitable Incorporated Organisations.

(AQW 995/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Charities Act (NI) 2008 (the Act) has been commenced in stages as is common with primary legislation of the size and complexity of the Act. To date seven Commencement Orders have been made, however, many parts of the Act have yet to be commenced including Part 11 and Schedule 7 which make provision for the establishment of Charitable Incorporated Organisations.

I have asked my officials to review these outstanding elements and will consider possible next steps.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Communities what proposals she will bring forward to provide mitigation for women in abusive relationships unable to claim the child element of Universal Credit.

(AQW 1020/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to protecting and assisting all victims of domestic violence and their families and I will be considering the matter as part of my ongoing review of the impact of welfare reform.

Staff in my Department take the issue of domestic violence extremely seriously, and I can assure you that the Department has protocols in place, and staff are trained to take particular action if it becomes apparent that a claimant has been or is a victim of domestic violence.

Moving forward, officials are currently developing proposals for a review of the welfare mitigation measures as detailed in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. Any proposals for further mitigations (including this issue) will also give due consideration to my Department's equality and human rights responsibilities. The outcome of the review will be presented to the Executive in due course.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Communities what further steps she will take to provide advice through the voluntary sector, notably through the advice sector, to people moving to Universal Credit or the Personal Independence Payment.

(AQW 1021/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is working at pace to ensure that in line with commitments set out in 'New Decade, New Approach' the extension of welfare mitigations takes place from 31st March. This will include the continued provision of additional advice services to people experiencing any changes to their social security benefits, including moving to Universal Credit or applying for Personal Independence Payment.

I am committed to protecting those most in need and the poorest across our society. Access to community based, independent advice is critical to meeting that commitment.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Communities to outline the proposed timescale for the relevant legislation and policy changes to enable the continuation of welfare mitigation measures beyond 31 March 2020, as outlined in the report of the Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group.

(AQW 1022/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I will be seeking Executive agreement to bring forward a Bill to reform the Welfare Reform Order beyond 31 March 2020. Officials are currently working as a priority to ensure all necessary arrangements are in place by 31 March 2020 with regards to passing the necessary subordinate legislation to extend the welfare mitigation package. An indicative timeframe for the passing of the required legislation is still being finalised.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities what progress has been made to provide an Enterprise Allowance scheme.

(AQW 1030/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is currently considering a range of options in respect to self-employment and how best to assist people in this category.

There is currently support for people planning to set up their own business or considering self-employment. Useful information on starting up your own business and the support available can be found on nidirect (see link below).

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/starting-your-own-business>

I will consider options available in due course.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities whether she has any plans to extend the transition mitigation, from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment, for 16 year olds.

(AQW 1046/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is taking all necessary steps to ensure appropriate legislation is in place to extend the mitigation schemes beyond 31st March 2020 as per the Executive commitment in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. This will include the current mitigation scheme that is in place for those aged 16 to 64 who may lose benefit as a result of moving from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities, in light of the Supreme Court judgement in the case of Siobhan McLaughlin for Judicial Review in 2018, (i) when compensation will be paid to bereaved cohabitants with dependent children who have

been denied Widowed Parent's Allowance; and (ii) what measures her Department is taking to ensure that Bereavement Support Payment is compatible with Human Rights legislation.

(AQW 1047/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Since the Judgement was delivered my Department has continued to consult with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to determine the best way ahead.

Until such a determination is made my Department cannot make a payment of Widowed Parents Allowance unless the statutory criteria for receipt of the benefit is met.

I will ensure my officials continue to liaise closely with DWP.

It is not appropriate to comment on live litigation but my officials will consider the outcome when the judgment becomes available.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities how many residents in Lagan Valley are (i) entitled to; and (ii) receive, the winter fuel payment.

(AQW 1059/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department does not hold information on the number of people entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment.

The latest figures available show that there were 18,270 Winter Fuel Payment recipients in Lagan Valley in 2018-19.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities whether she has any plans to reopen the community halls grants scheme.

(AQW 1087/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The "New Decade, New Approach" agreement includes a number of commitments made by the British Government to the restored Executive including a commitment to provide funding to establish a Culture and Community fund.

The British Government have an obligation to resource the commitments set out in the deal. I will continue to keep this under review.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities to outline any plans her Department has for an improvement scheme in the Newcastle area, which will include the provision of improved facilities for cyclists.

(AQW 1108/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department has commissioned a Transportation Study for Newcastle town centre which will examine all modes of transport including cycling provision. On completion of the Study, the Department, in conjunction with the Department for Infrastructure, will consider the need for transportation improvements.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities how much funding her Department contributed, directly or indirectly, towards hosting The Open 2019 golf tournament.

(AQW 1115/17-22)

Ms Hargey: DfC did not contribute any funding directly towards hosting The Open 2019 golf tournament.

DfC, through Sport NI, contributed funding of £97,700 for a number of projects to generate indirect benefits from hosting The 148th Open at Royal Portrush. These projects were aimed at building on the legacy of hosting the event by increasing opportunities for under-represented groups to participate in golf. This investment included –

- £30,000 to the Golfing Union of Ireland for specialist golf equipment for its High Performance Academy in Antrim, to help develop young golfers, disabled golfers and others who represent NI at a competitive level.
- £35,000 to the Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council for 'The Open Legacy Primary School Programme' which delivered golfing sessions across 24 schools in the Council area.
- £32,700 to five local Councils to deliver Inclusive Golf Programmes to open up golf opportunities to under-represented groups, including females, visually impaired golfers and those with physical and intellectual disabilities.

My Department also provided funding of £17million towards the Portrush Regeneration Programme.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline her Department's plans to increase new build social housing.

(AQW 1140/17-22)

Ms Hargey: New Decade, New Approach committed to "enhanced investment in new social home starts". I am currently considering the plans of my Department's Social Housing Development Programme for the next 3 years.

In 19/20, £146m is being invested against a target of 1850 new social housing starts.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities how many people are currently on the Housing Executive's housing waiting list.

(AQW 1141/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has advised that the total number of applicants on the social housing waiting list on the final day of the last available quarter (31 December 2019) was 38,308 applicants.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Communities to detail the savings achieved by the merger of local councils in each of the last four years.

(AQW 1146/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The local government reform programme is based on a model which involved significant upfront costs over five years while expected to deliver substantial longer term savings over twenty-five years.

My Department is commencing an initial review of local government reform covering the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2019 which will analyse both monetary and non-monetary factors. The review is expected to be completed by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Communities to outline the reasons for the reduced requirements for (i) Housing Benefit, totalling £6.7M ; (ii) Personal Independence Payments, totalling £1.1M; and (iii) Welfare Mitigation Measures, totalling £12.3M in the January Monitoring Round.

(AQW 1187/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In each Monitoring Round my Department seeks to maintain a position in order to live within strict tolerances whilst ensuring that appropriate funding remains in place to meet business needs. The reduced requirements noted are demand led Ring Fenced Budgets which can only be used for the purposes allocated.

- (i) Housing Benefit Rates is a benefit administered by the Housing Executive for tenants and Land and Property Services (LPS) for home owners. Currently working age customers who are in receipt of Universal Credit are migrating to the new Rates Rebate scheme (administered and accounted for by LPS) and it is difficult to forecast the numbers migrating.
- (ii) Personal Independence Payments (PIP) contract costs were lower than forecast following a DWP announcement that over 65's with long term health conditions will no longer need to be reassessed. As DfC maintains parity with DWP on social security issues, the same policy was adopted.
- (iii) The reduced requirement for mitigations has arisen due to a significant increase in successful appeals for PIP. Once an appeal is successful the associated costs are considered to be standard PIP costs rather than mitigation measures.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the level of outstanding borrowing for each of the 11 councils; and (i) their net annual budget, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1194/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The level of outstanding borrowing is disclosed in the balance sheet of the annual accounts of each council. However, the net budget is not required to be disclosed in councils' financial statements.

- (i) The level of outstanding borrowing (long term and short term), as disclosed in the balance sheet of the councils' annual certified accounts at 31 March 2017, 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2019 respectively is set out in the table below.

Council	Borrowing (£)		
	31 March 2017	31 March 2018	31 March 2019
Antrim & Newtownabbey	53,719,129	51,237,232	49,736,014
Ards & North Down	53,358,859	60,406,981	78,900,163
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	45,036,207	42,841,864	40,669,273
Belfast City Council	36,607,758	36,763,023	62,888,981
Causeway Coast & Glens	73,864,630	69,089,313	71,188,000
Derry & Strabane	41,982,781	53,670,322	50,234,150
Fermanagh & Omagh	10,646,806	8,233,333	7,215,870
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	30,363,651	28,595,463	27,032,294
Mid & East Antrim Council	61,289,068	62,859,321	62,798,320
Mid Ulster Council	9,037,043	7,381,214	6,746,933
Newry Mourne & Down	59,534,358	65,149,983	69,750,776

- (ii) The net annual budget figures for councils are not disclosed in the certified accounts and my Department does not hold this information. The budget figure is set by each council and depends not only on grants from central government but also anticipated rates income, which is in turn dependent on the district rate struck by individual councils.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has provided guidance on Universal Credit to the Department of Education in relation to setting criteria for socially disadvantaged school admissions.

(AQW 1250/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The setting of criteria for socially disadvantaged school admissions, is a matter for the Department of Education. However, Department for Communities officials have worked closely with officials in the Department of Education to provide the information and detail they need to support the schools admissions process.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities whether she intends to initiate a review of the Universal Credit complaints process.

(AQO 157/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Can I thank the Member for his question and his ongoing interest in Universal Credit.

The purpose of any complaints process is to give people the chance to complain about any aspect of a service they feel has let them down. I want to ensure that people who bring forward a complaint can trust the process and the outcome.

Before a case is treated as a formal complaint we encourage the person to contact the office managing their case and raise their concern directly there. This is often the quickest way to resolve any issues and, if necessary, put things right. If the person is unhappy after this, their complaint will be passed to the Universal Credit Customer Service team. This is Stage One of the complaints process and a reply will be provided within ten working days. If the person remains unhappy they can escalate their complaint to the next stage (Stage Two) where a senior official will further investigate their case and reply, again within ten working days. The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and the Independent Case Examiner provide further avenues of complaint if someone remains dissatisfied.

Since the introduction of Universal Credit in September 2017 we have received seventy-five (75) complaints. This is 0.12% of the Universal Credit caseload.

I am very conscious of the importance of having an effective complaints handling process, and am committed to keeping this under continuous review.

I have already raised my own complaint directly with the British Prime Minister, and would urge all Members to do likewise, about the impact Welfare Reform and Universal Credit are having on our people, often the most vulnerable in our society.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the Personal Independence Payment appeals process.

(AQO 162/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is committed to getting benefit entitlement decisions right first time and to resolving disputes against decisions at the earliest stage in the process, avoiding the need for referral to an independent Appeal Tribunal. The Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appeals process has been designed to deliver these commitments to the people who submit a claim for PIP.

Before a person can make an appeal against a PIP decision they must first ask for the decision to be formally looked at again. This is known as a Mandatory Reconsideration. Since PIP was introduced over 20% of Mandatory Reconsideration requests have resulted in a change to the original PIP decision because additional evidence has been provided which was not available to the officer who made the initial decision.

If, following the Mandatory Reconsideration, a person still wishes to appeal against the PIP decision they must submit their appeal in writing or by completing an appeal form to The Appeals Service (TAS). An appeal must be received by TAS within one month from the date of the Mandatory Reconsideration decision.

Since its introduction on 20 June 2016 just over 200,000 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) decisions have been made. Approximately 10% of these decisions have proceeded to appeal. The number of decisions overturned at appeal represents 3% of all decisions made.

Decisions overturned at appeal are primarily because either additional evidence was presented at the Appeal Tribunal which was not available to the officer who made the decision or that the Tribunal took a different view of the evidence available to the Department when the decision was made, with neither conclusion being unreasonable. My Department has recently introduced improvements to the Mandatory Reconsideration process which is intended to obtain any additional information at that point which may lead to decisions being revised and prevent unnecessary appeals.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities what plans her Department has to increase the Rates Support Grant to less well-off councils.

(AQO 159/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The level of the Rates Support Grant budget for the 2020/2021 financial year will only be decided when the Departmental Budget has been confirmed.

Decisions affecting the level of Rates Support Grant, that will be available next year, will only be considered in the context of the wider budgetary position of my Department.

This grant is a support grant to eligible councils but is discretionary in terms of value.

I am travelling to the North West on 19 February 2020 to meet the Chief Executives of affected councils to discuss the Rates Support Grant.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities what work her Department has undertaken on the procurement of a new payment exception service for the most vulnerable Post Office card account customers that are unable to access or use a mainstream account.

(AQO 158/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My officials are working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to establish a new payment exception service for those customers who cannot access or manage mainstream accounts, even with support.

This includes identifying the commercial options that are available for the procurement of a suitable replacement payment exception service, and I will be given an opportunity to consider these in coming months.

I am committed to ensuring that all vulnerable customers will continue to have access to their benefit payments in a way that meets their needs, and my officials are working to put in place a suitable, accessible payment exception service that will replace the Post Office card account once that contract ends.

My Department recognises that some customers may be reluctant or have difficulty with changing their current method of payment, and support services are available to assist them with choosing a product that suits their circumstances.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister for Communities to outline the savings made since the reduction in the number of councils from 26 to 11.

(AQO 156/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The local government reform programme is based on a model which involved significant upfront costs in the first five years with expected savings being delivered over the following twenty-five years.

My Department is commencing an initial review of local government reform covering the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2019 and will analyse both monetary and non-monetary factors. Terms of reference will be agreed between the Department and the **Society of Local Authority Chief Executives** (SOLACE NI) and the review is expected to be completed by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Communities whether she will review the provision of temporary accommodation in rural towns such as Omagh.

(AQO 161/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has commenced a comprehensive review of all temporary accommodation. The results of this strategic review will inform the future requirements for the provision of temporary accommodation. It is anticipated that this review will be completed during the 2020/21 financial year.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the implementation of the proposals of the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations.

(AQO 160/17-22)

Ms Hargey: A consultation on 'A Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations' ran from September to December 2017.

This was the culmination of a Department-led review to examine the Housing Selection Scheme.

During previous phases of the Review, stakeholders commented that they valued aspects of the current Scheme, including the principle of universal access and that allocations should prioritise applicants in greatest need.

However some stakeholders also raised concerns, saying, for example, that applicants with intimidation points are given too much priority over other applicants who have received threats of violence or experienced violence, such as victims of domestic abuse.

Taken together, the proposals contained in the consultation document are intended to produce five key outcomes:

- A greater range of solutions to meet housing need;
- An improved system for the most vulnerable applicants;
- A more accurate waiting list that reflects current housing circumstances;
- Those in greatest housing need receive priority, with recognition of their time in need; and
- Better use of public resources by ensuring the waiting list moves smoothly.

While improvements to the allocations system cannot physically deliver more social homes, they can ensure we make the best use of our existing resources.

Analysis of stakeholder feedback has been completed by my Departmental officials.

I will be considering the Review, options and next steps in the coming weeks.

Department of Education

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to outline how much of the additional £4m for Further Education colleges is earmarked for the South Eastern Regional College.

(AQW 1142/17-22)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): An additional £4m was released within the January Monitoring Round to Further Education Colleges (£3m resource and £1m capital). Of this £4m, £805k was allocated to South Eastern Regional College (SERC) with the following split:

Expenditure Type	(£'000s)
Capital	300
Resource	505
Total	805

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on proposed capital investment at Bunscoil an Iúir, Newry.
(AQW 1299/17-22)

Mr Weir: I can advise you that Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the managing authority for Bunscoil an Iúir, has submitted a major works application for the school under the latest call for major works, which closed on 31 October 2019.

My officials are currently undertaking preparatory work to prioritise applications received for a possible major capital announcement in the coming months.

As this is a live and ultimately competitive process, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any proposed capital investment at Bunscoil an Iúir at this time.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's plans to ensure schools have sustainable budgets, including in cases where mergers are being sought.

(AQW 1420/17-22)

Mr Weir: The financial pressures facing schools has been acknowledged in the 'New Decade New Approach' agreement, which includes a commitment to address the resourcing pressures in schools, for which my Department has identified a budget pressure of £60m for 2020-21.

In cases where mergers are being sought, a school's financial position forms part of the assessment of any school's sustainability. Where proposals are brought forward for significant changes to the design of education provision, an assessment is carried out on how the proposal intends to address any budgetary issues (or other sustainability concerns) at the affected schools.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail what progress has been made by his Department on each of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Integrated Education.

(AQW 1585/17-22)

Mr Weir: I have not yet taken any decisions on the 39 recommendations made in the Independent Review of Integrated Education Report.

I published the Report on 2 March 2017 in advance of considering recommendations and without any endorsement. Since then my Department has continued to fulfil its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated Education. This means that progress has been made on a number of the operational recommendations contained in the Report, in particular those relating to guidance and engagement. Any recommendations relating to legislation and policy change have not been progressed in the interim as they required Ministerial scrutiny.

My officials are attending the Education Committee on 4 March 2020 about the Independent Review of Integrated Education and will be able to provide further detail on the actions taken to date at that time.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) what steps would be involved in making special educational needs training and disability awareness modules compulsory, as part of teacher training curriculums; and (ii) whether her Department has any plans to pursue this.

(AQW 1611/17-22)

Mr Weir: All Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers in Northern Ireland already provide compulsory modules which specifically relate to Special Educational Needs (SEN) / Disability Awareness within their Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes.

While the Department is responsible for the overall approval of ITE programmes (as laid out in DE Circular 2010/03), the precise content of courses, and individual modules within them, is determined by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

In doing so the HEIs are, however, responsive to any changing skills requirements identified by schools and the educational priorities set by the Department.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) training for teachers, including those currently coming through ITE, is being considered through the Education Authority led Capacity Building Project. This project forms part of the programme of work arising from the 2017 Northern Ireland Audit Office report on SEN.

If current ITE training around SEN and disability needs to be strengthened, I will work with the various institutions to do so; acting jointly with the Minister for the Economy, who funds all HEIs.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of data protection breaches that have been recorded by (i) the Education Authority; (ii) the Department of Education; and to detail the number of individuals impacted by each breach, in each of the last four years.

(AQW 1633/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) and the Department of Education (DE) are required to report personal data breaches to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) based on an assessment of the potential adverse consequences for individuals, on how serious or substantial these are and how likely they are to happen. If the breach is likely to result in a high risk of adversely affecting individuals' rights and freedoms, those individuals must be notified without undue delay. During the last four full years for which figures are available the EA and DE have reported personal data breaches to the ICO as follows:

(i) EA:

2018/19: Five personal data breaches reported to ICO:

- One of the data breaches reported to the ICO - impacted 10 individuals;
- One of the data breaches reported to the ICO - impacted two individuals;
- Two of the data breaches reported to the ICO - impacted one individual (in each case);
- In relation to the other data breach reported to the ICO, it was not possible to confirm how many individuals were impacted but the EA's investigation of the breach found no evidence that the breach resulted in any consequences or harm to any individual.

2017/18: No personal data breaches reported to ICO

2016/17: No personal data breaches reported to ICO

2015/16: No personal data breaches reported to ICO

(ii) DE

2018/19: No data breaches reported to ICO although DE provided an explanation of a "confidentiality breach", where there was an accidental disclosure of personal data that been reported to the ICO by the impacted individual. On receipt of the Department's report into the breach, the ICO took no further action.

2017/18: No personal data breaches reported to ICO.

2016/17: One personal data breach reported to ICO and the impacted individual.

2015/16: One personal data breach reported to ICO and the impacted individual.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to outline what mechanisms his Department has in place to monitor the number of data protection breaches in schools.

(AQW 1634/17-22)

Mr Weir: Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), each school is a data controller and as such is responsible for ensuring that all practices relating to the handling of personal data in the school meet the requirements set out in the legislation. Responsibility for compliance with the data protection legislation rests with the Board of Governors and there is a requirement for all schools to appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO). Schools may, however, choose to appoint the Education Authority (EA) as their DPO. Under this arrangement, schools are required to report any alleged or potential personal data breaches to the EA as DPO. The EA keeps a record of all personal data breaches reported to it by schools.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teachers who have had their roles made permanent following a period of long-term substitution, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1635/17-22)

Mr Weir: Available records show that 281 teachers have had their roles made permanent following a period of long-term substitution in the last five years. Information has been received from Education Authority and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools as follows:

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Totals
EA	*	36	25	29	22	112

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Totals
CCMS	35	39	24	42	29	169
Totals	35	75	49	71	51	281

* EA does not hold centralised records of teachers made permanent prior to 2016.

Figures do not include Voluntary Grammar / Grant Maintained Integrated schools.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Education Authority's special school development proposals and capital programmes.

(AQW 1666/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department has discussed with the Education Authority (EA) the need for a framework against which Development Proposals (DPs) proposing changes to the design of local and regional special needs provision can be assessed.

This is necessary before the EA commences consultation on special education needs related DPs contained within the current Action Plan so that the Department has an area context, and specified criteria, against which it can assess the merits of individual proposals.

While this remains work in progress, some progress has been made in recent weeks and further engagement with the EA is scheduled to advance this important work.

The following special schools have been announced to advance in design under the School Enhancement Programme Second Call (SEP2):

- Longstone School, Dundonald
- Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick
- Thornfield House School, Newtownabbey
- Beechlaw School, Hillsborough
- Sandelford School, Coleraine
- Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon
- Roddensvale School, Larne
- Kilronan School, Magherafelt
- Lisanally Special School, Armagh
- Riverside School, Antrim

The Education Authority (EA) is progressing all the SEP2 schemes in special schools. At this stage it is not possible to be definitive about the likely spend on any individual project until the technical feasibility work is complete however SEP projects typically result in investment of between £2.5m and £4m.

There are also major works projects ongoing at Rossmar School and Ardnashee School and College.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1143/17-22, what proportion of the additional £10m secured through the January monitoring round will be allocated to educational support within classrooms.

(AQW 1710/17-22)

Mr Weir: Following the £10 million additional funding secured through the January monitoring round, £4.6 million has been allocated to address existing in-year demand pressures in supporting delivery of the provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN) within a classroom setting. The remaining £5.4 million is to address existing pressures in Pupil Support (£1.5m) and SEN related transport (£3.9m).

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to outline the number of applications considered by his Department for the establishment of (i) nursery units; and (ii) irish-medium nursery units in each of the last three years, and for the next academic year by constituency.

(AQW 1720/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department has taken decisions on 22 Development Proposals (DPs) which sought to establish Nursery Units at schools during the 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, and 2020/21 (to date) academic years. This includes five DPs which sought to establish such provision at Irish-medium settings.

There are currently no published DPs under consideration by my Department which are awaiting a decision to establish provision of this nature for the remainder of the 2020/21 academic year, but further DPs may be published by the Education Authority that impact on this.

Details of these proposals and the decisions that resulted, referenced to constituency, are provided in the following table.

DP No	Primary School	Constituency	Sector	Proposed Date of Establishment	Approved
Proposing Establishment in 2020/21 Academic Year (to date)					
581	Currie PS, Belfast	Belfast North	Controlled	01/09/20	Approved
580	Glencraig Integrated Primary School, Hollywood	North Down	Integrated	01/09/20	Approved
568	Spires Integrated PS, Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	Integrated	01/09/20	Not approved
563	Bridge Integrated Primary School, Banbridge	Upper Bann	Integrated	01/09/20	Not approved
Proposing Establishment in 2019/20 Academic Year					
559	Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel	South Down	Irish Medium	01/09/19	Not approved
543	Enniskillen Integrated PS, Enniskillen	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	Integrated	01/09/19	Not approved
542	Mill Strand Integrated Primary School, Portrush	East Londonderry	Integrated	01/09/19	Approved
535	Rowandale Integrated Primary School, Moira	Lagan Valley	Integrated	01/09/19	Not approved
523	Drumlins Integrated Primary School, Ballynahinch	Strangford	Integrated	01/09/19	Not approved
464	Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast	Belfast South	Integrated	01/09/19	Approved
Proposing Establishment in 2018/19 Academic Year					
541	Gaelscoil Neachtain, Dungiven	East Londonderry	Irish Medium	01/09/18	Approved
518	Oakwood Integrated Primary School, Dunmurray	Lagan Valley	Integrated	01/09/18	Approved
515	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan	South Down	Irish Medium	01/09/18	Approved
Proposing Establishment in 2017/18 Academic Year					
488	Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	Integrated	01/09/17	Not Approved
487	Bridge Integrated Primary School, Banbridge	Upper Bann	Integrated	01/09/17	Not Approved
484	Mill Strand Integrated Primary School, Portrush	East Londonderry	Integrated	01/09/17	Not Approved
479	Moneyrea Primary School, Moneyrea	Strangford	Controlled	01/09/17	Approved
478	Killyleagh Primary School, Killyleagh	Strangford	Controlled Integrated	01/09/17	Approved
474	St Colmcille's Primary School, Carrickmore	West Tyrone	Irish Medium	01/09/17	Not Approved
473	Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Belfast	Belfast South	Integrated	01/09/17	Approved
468	Carr's Glen Primary School, Belfast	Belfast North	Controlled	01/09/17	Approved

DP No	Primary School	Constituency	Sector	Proposed Date of Establishment	Approved
449	Gaelscoil Éanna, Belfast	Belfast North	Irish Medium	01/09/17	Approved with modification

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education to provide details on the present use of and plans for the former school buildings at; (i) Moneydarragh Primary School, Annalong; (ii) St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman, Annalong; and (iii) St Joseph's Primary School, Ballymartin, Kilkeel.

(AQW 1723/17-22)

Mr Weir: "Voluntary Grammar, Maintained and Grant Maintained Integrated schools are owned and managed by the school Trustees. When a school closes and the site is no longer required for educational purposes, responsibility for these assets reverts solely to the Trustees.

Where no further educational use has been identified, the Trustees may decide to retain or dispose of the site, however my Department may seek grant recovery from the Trustees under the Voluntary Schools Building Grant Regulations (NI) 1993.

While no further educational use has currently been identified for Moneydarragh Primary School or St Joseph's Primary School, the site of St Mary's Primary School is included in feasibility options for the new school as part of the Lower Mourne Project"

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) how his Department and the various education sectors recognises parental responsibility; (ii) whether there are any plans to update the policy; and, if there are (iii) the timescale to update the policy.

(AQW 1736/17-22)

Mr Weir:

- (i) Parental responsibility is recognised by the Department of Education (DE) and other education sectors on the legislative basis, as it is contained within the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and relevant secondary legislation. Associated guidance is also provided in DE Circular 1999/17.
- (ii) (iii) DE Circular 1999/7 is currently under review and a revised circular will be published in due course.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the terms and conditions for education welfare staff in the Education Authority, with regard to term time and annual leave; and (ii) what service operates to assist children in need of support during school closure periods.

(AQW 1738/17-22)

Mr Weir:

- (i) Operational Education Welfare staff in the Education Authority are employed under National Joint Council (NJC) Terms and Conditions of Employment and have an annual leave entitlement based on their grade/continuous service.

Annual Leave entitlements based on full-time working of 36 hours per week are set out in the table below. Staff with alternative work patterns have leave awarded on a pro rata basis.

		<5 Yrs Service	>5 Yrs Service
Regional Education Welfare Officer	Pts 19-29	23	30
Senior Regional Education Welfare Officer	Pts 36-39	25	31
Deputy Chief Education Welfare Officer	Pts 40-43	25	31
Chief Education Welfare Officer	Pts 43-46	27	33
Head of Education Welfare	Pts 52-55	27	33

The leave year begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March each year. Annual leave can be requested throughout the period and leave requests are subject to line manager approval. Education welfare staff in the Education Authority may avail of Flexible Working/Family Friendly/Term Time working arrangements etc. on application and subject to approval by Line Management.

- (ii) The Education Welfare Service is available throughout the year excluding weekends and statutory holiday periods. Schools are provided with the name and contact details of an Education Welfare Officer who is their key point of contact. Further details about the Education Welfare Service are available on the Education Authority webpage at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/education-welfare-service>

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to outline measures his Department is taking to ensure primary and post-primary schools have appropriately funded music departments.

(AQW 1750/17-22)

Mr Weir: Music is a statutory part of the curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3, and in addition, pupils may choose to study music as an exam choice at Key Stage 4. Schools' receive delegated budgets, through the Common Funding Scheme, to enable Boards of Governors and Principals to use resources in accordance with individual school's needs and priorities, including the effective delivery of the curriculum. It is therefore for schools' to determine how much funding is attributed to music to deliver the curriculum.

The Education Authority (EA) Music Service also offers access to music education in schools' through both school based tuition and larger performance opportunities in orchestras. The EA determines the level of funding allocated for the Music Service.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Education, with regard to a statement of special educational needs, to outline the number of (i) applications; (ii) requests; and (iii) rejections, in the last three years.

(AQW 1768/17-22)

Mr Weir:

(i) Applications and (ii) requests:

This has been interpreted as the number of referrals/requests received from a range of sources, including school, parent, Educational Psychologist and Medical Officer, for consideration of a Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

10,631 requests/referrals were received within the Education Authority (EA) in the years 2017 to 2019. Of these requests, 1,326 were repeat applications.

(ii) Rejections:

This has been interpreted as the number of referrals/requests for Statutory Assessment received which did not proceed to initiation of the Statutory Assessment process.

2,521 referrals/requests received in the years 2017 to 2019 did not proceed to a Statutory Assessment of SEN.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many schools provide counselling services; (ii) the allocation of such provision; (iii) the criteria for such provision; and (iv) whether there is a waiting list for such provision.

(AQW 1769/17-22)

Mr Weir:

(i) How many schools provide counselling services

The Education Authority (EA) manages counselling delivery through a procured Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS). This service provides counselling for pupils in all post primary mainstream schools and post primary aged pupils in all Special Schools. In total 233 schools access this support.

ICSS is not available for primary school pupils. Schools can however independently arrange for counselling and use their existing delegated budget to absorb any associated costs. The Department does not hold information on the numbers of schools who independently arrange for counselling.

(ii) The allocation of such provision

Pupil Enrolment Numbers	Days Per Week	Counselling Sessions per week	'Drop Ins' per week (1 Hour)
1-499	0.5	3	1
500-999	1	5	1
1000-1499	1.5	8	1
1500+	2	10	1

(iii) The criteria for such provision

Referrals for counselling sessions can only be made by the following people:

- The young person,
- A parent or carer;
- School staff.

- (iv) Whether there is a waiting list for such provision.

Waiting lists are retained by the school's Key Contact and are the responsibility of the school at all times.

Waiting lists are discussed at Contract Management Meetings at which the EA ICSS Contract Manager and the ICSS Provider attends.

As of 31 December 2019, there are 767 young people on the waiting list in post primary schools and 31 young people on the waiting list in special schools. Subsequent to this the school counsellors have assessed most of these young people with counselling planned to start for most young people during January 2020.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) how many children have received a statement of special educational needs for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in East Belfast, over the last three years; and (ii) the average time for the statementing process to be completed.

(AQW 1771/17-22)

Mr Weir: The answer to (i) is contained in the table below.

Number of pupils residing in the Belfast East constituency with a statement of special education needs for ADHD and ASD 2016/17 to 2018/19

	ADHD	ASD
2018/19	27	293
2017/18	32	262
2016/17	31	247

Source: Annual school census

Note: Information refers to the primary SEN of the pupil

Autism Spectrum Disorder includes Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

- (ii) the average time for the statementing process to be completed. The average length of time for statements to be completed was 41.5 weeks. This relates specifically to those pupils living in the East Belfast constituency area.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister of Education for an update on progress of a new build for Saint Conor's College, currently situated at two sites in Clady and Kilrea.

(AQW 1773/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, as the managing authority for St Conor's College, has submitted an application for the school under the latest call for major works, which closed on 31 October 2019.

All applications submitted under this call are currently being considered by officials and applications which meet the eligibility criteria will be scored in accordance with the published protocol.

As this is a live and ultimately competitive process, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the provision of a new build for St Conor's College at this time.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education when he expects building work to begin on a new primary school for Islandmagee.

(AQW 1782/17-22)

Mr Weir: An Integrated Consultancy Team has been appointed by the Education Authority to undertake the design of the new building. The programme currently anticipates a start on site of summer 2021; however, this is dependent on a number of factors, including the approval of a planning application which will be submitted in summer 2020.

School representatives will continue to be kept informed of progress through regular Project Board meetings.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education whether there is a plan in place to reduce the budget deficit within our schools.

(AQW 1797/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority, as funding authority for all grant-aided schools, works closely with individual schools in the development and agreement of school financial plans. There is therefore a clear focus on good financial management across the sector. Notwithstanding this, the financial pressures facing schools has been acknowledged in the 'New Decade New Approach' agreement, which includes a commitment to address the resourcing pressures in schools, for which my Department has identified a pressure of £60m for 2020-21.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education how many children in the Upper Bann constituency avail of instrumental tuition outside of Whole Class Instrumental Programmes.

(AQW 1798/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has operational responsibility for the Music Service. I am advised that, in addition to whole class instrumental programmes delivered to pupils as part of the curriculum, there are approximately 784 pupils receiving instrumental tuition from the Music Service in the Upper Bann constituency.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW1812/09 and AQW51771/11-16, when will a planning application be submitted for a new build primary school at Low Road, Islandmagee, to bring together the junior and senior campuses, formerly Mullaghduh Primary School and Kilcoan Primary School.

(AQW 1802/17-22)

Mr Weir: An Integrated Consultancy Team has been appointed by the Education Authority to undertake the design of the new school building.

At this time it is envisaged that a planning application for the new building will be submitted in summer 2020.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW1812/09 and AQW51771/11-16, when was the business case approval awarded for a new build primary school at Islandmagee to merge Mullaghduh Primary School and Kilcoan Primary School.

(AQW 1803/17-22)

Mr Weir: The business case for a new five class primary school on a site at the Low Road, Islandmagee, was approved by the Department of Education Finance Director on 25 July 2019.

An Integrated Consultancy Team has been appointed by the Education Authority to undertake the design of the new school.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of additional funding he will be providing to schools to address (i) the ongoing industrial dispute; and (ii) pressures in schools.

(AQW 1812/17-22)

Mr Weir: Under the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) the NI Executive has committed to resolving the current teachers' industrial dispute and to address resourcing pressures in schools. However, as commitments in the NDNA agreement can only be delivered with additional funding, negotiations on the associated financial package continue.

While an agreement in principle was reached in June 2019 which has the potential to resolve the teachers' pay dispute, a formal offer cannot be made to teachers' unions until funding has been secured.

I fully recognise that school budgets are under severe pressure, and I will continue to work with my Executive colleagues to resolve the teachers' industrial dispute and to deliver additional frontline resources to schools.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the effectiveness of the current Food in Schools policy for school lunches and other food in primary and post-primary schools.

(AQW 1818/17-22)

Mr Weir: The joint Department of Education and Department of Health 'Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes' Food in Schools Policy was published in 2013. It is an overarching policy advocating a 'whole school approach' to all food provided and consumed in schools and to developing knowledge and skills in relation to healthy eating and lifestyles. The Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food and Drinks in Schools are a key element of the Food in Schools policy and apply to all grant-aided schools.

The Education Authority (EA) School Catering Service is responsible for providing schools meals and may provide other food in schools to some 1100 locations for approximately 130,000 pupils each day. The service monitors all aspects of service delivery on a regular basis using an agreed audit report completed by Area Catering Managers and Area Catering Supervisors.

In relation to compliance with compulsory nutritional standards as part of the Food in Schools Policy, the EA has a number of controls in place. These include the procurement of food to meet the standards, checking of menus for compliance with a sample being verified by the Regional Food in Schools Coordinator and regular visits to schools to ensure that all aspects of the standards are delivered. All Catering staff receive on-going training in relation to Nutritional Standards commensurate with their role. The Regional Food in Schools Coordinator meets regularly with the Senior Catering Managers to provide updates and support the service with any actions necessary.

In May 2019 Internal Audit within the Education Authority carried out an audit of the service. This included compliance with Nutritional Standards for school lunches as part of their terms of reference. They reported a high level of compliance in this area with no exceptions noted.

I launched a public consultation on 30 January seeking views on a number of proposed updates to the Nutritional Standards for School Food. Subject to the outcome of this consultation and availability of funding, it is planned that the updated standards will be in place by September 2020. The consultation closes on 27 March 2020.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of children waiting for a statement of special educational needs in Upper Bann; and (ii) how long they have been waiting for the statement.
(AQW 1865/17-22)

Mr Weir:

- i) This has been interpreted as the number of children for whom Statutory Assessment of special educational needs (SEN) has been initiated and either a Note in Lieu of a Statement or a Final Statement is awaited. In this regard, there are 83 pupils in Upper Bann in this category.
- (ii) This has been interpreted as the number of weeks from receipt of referral for Statutory Assessment of SEN to the current day. The Education Authority is unable to provide figures relating to individual cases. The average current waiting time for the 83 children referred to in (i) is 28.2 weeks.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.
(AQW 1880/17-22)

Mr Weir: An Executive sub-committee on EU Exit issues has been established and will be a key structure in the co-ordination of the Executive's response to the outworkings of the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

To support the Executive sub-committee the Executive Office have set up a cross-departmental Trade and Protocol group to co-ordinate the work of officials across the Departments most affected by Brexit. The Department of Education is not represented on the group as the provisions of the Protocol do not have direct relevance to the remit of the Department.

While the Department continues to monitor and input as appropriate to work on the future relationship with the EU, there are at present no departmental officials working on ensuring compliance with the Protocol.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding per pupil in the (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; and (iii) Irish-medium sectors.
(AQW 1892/17-22)

Mr Weir: The levels of funding per pupil in 2019-20, distributed through the Common Funding Formula (CFF) only, in the (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; and (iii) Irish-medium sectors, are reflected in the table below.

Sector	2019-20 Per Pupil Funding through the CFF* £
Controlled	3,531
Maintained	3,611
Irish-medium ⁽¹⁾	3,821

* Data source: CFF 2019-20, which included funding to mitigate the increase in Teachers' Employer's Superannuation costs effective from 1 April 2019.

(1) Controlled and maintained Irish-medium schools are included in the Irish-medium sector above.

This excludes special schools, as these schools are not funded through the CFF, and voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools, as these schools are designated as separate sectors.

The Department is unable to disaggregate all funding on a per pupil basis.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQO 66/17-22, (i) for a breakdown of the £28.5m Fresh Start funding spent by the Department on shared and integrated education; and (ii) for a breakdown of capital spending on shared and integrated education.
(AQW 1914/17-22)

Mr Weir:

- (i) The total spend of £28.5m from the Fresh Start funding to the end of December 2019 is split as follows:
 - Integrated Education - £14.3m
 - Shared Education - £14.2m
- (ii) In addition, a total of £45.5m has been spent on Integrated Education Major Capital Builds and School Enhancement Programmes since 2013. There has been no capital spend on Shared Education outside of the Fresh Start Programme.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the enrolment numbers for each primary school and post-primary school in the West Tyrone constituency, for the past 3 years; and (ii) the projected enrolment for the 2021/22 year.

(AQW 1933/17-22)

Mr Weir: The enrolment numbers for each primary and post primary school in the West Tyrone constituency can be found in the table below.

(i) Total enrolment of primary schools in the West Tyrone constituency 2017/18 to 2019/20P

School Name	Academic Year		
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20P
McClintock Primary School	87	93	99
Dunmullan Primary School	33	35	27
Erganagh Primary School	36	25	
Edwards Primary School	235	243	258
Killen Primary School	107	105	109
Gillygooley Primary School	25	25	24
Denamona Primary School	70	74	70
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School, Omagh	45	48	47
Langfield Primary School	22	21	28
Omagh County Primary School	339	337	352
Dromore Primary School	49	41	46
Strabane Controlled Primary School	274	273	273
Donemana Primary School	103	110	110
Artigarvan Primary School	157	160	163
Gibson Primary School	323	340	333
Newtownstewart Model Primary School	59	63	71
Gortin Primary School	49	55	63
Sion Mills Primary School	262	261	256
Bready Jubilee Primary School	128	129	121
Cooley Primary School	127	126	120
Ardstraw Jubilee Primary School	83	87	91
Magheralough Primary School	18		
St Brigid's Primary School, Altamuskin	58	56	44
Tummery Primary School	38	30	36
St Mary's Primary School, Killyclogher	373	376	361
St Matthew's Primary School, Garvaghey	5		
Knocknagor Primary School	69	65	60
Drumduff Primary School	41	33	29
St Brigid's Primary School, Mountfield	44	56	53
St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin	80	82	84
Drumlisk Primary School	51	45	44
St Eugene's Primary School, Victoria Bridge	54	53	54
St Joseph's Primary School, Glenmornan	33	27	
St Lawrence's Primary School	267	262	260
St Brigid's Primary School, Cranagh	21	21	23

School Name	Academic Year		
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20P
St Eugene's Primary School, Tyrcur	28	27	37
St Caireall's Primary School	94	111	115
St Joseph's Primary School, Drumquin	132	135	137
Recarson Primary School	96	112	114
St Patrick's Primary School, Eskra	88	84	90
Sacred Heart Primary School, Tattyreagh	81	73	76
Altishane Primary School	11	10	
Roscavey Primary School	71	70	70
Loughash Primary School	36	34	
St Columba's Primary School, Clady	132	130	134
St Teresa's Primary School, Loughmacrory	156	166	172
St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore	347	356	379
St Patrick's Primary School, Newtownstewart	123	119	117
St Patrick's Primary School, Castleberg	317	313	318
St Mary's Primary School, Cloughcor	179	172	176
St Peter's Primary School, Plumbridge	70	68	71
St Conor's Primary School, Omagh	451	445	444
St Scire's Primary School	121	130	129
St Dympna's Primary School, Dromore,	200	206	202
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Beragh	112	109	114
St Patrick's Primary School, Donemana	34	34	
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Omagh	111	106	108
Christ The King Primary School, Omagh	216	211	210
St Theresa's Primary School, Glebe	105	112	111
All Saints Primary School	119	118	113
Holy Family Primary School, Omagh	389	387	381
St Mary's Primary School, Strabane	734	740	736
St Catherine's Primary School	503	482	479
St Michaels Primary School, Dunamanagh			94
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	175	166	166
Gaelscoil na gCrann	169	182	188
Omagh Integrated Primary School	338	304	298

Source: Annual School Census

Figures relating to the 2019/20 academic year are provisional

- (i) Total enrolment of post primary schools in the West Tyrone constituency 2017/18 to 2019/20P

School Name	Academic Year		
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20P
Castleberg High School	396	394	420
Omagh High School	421	402	407
Dean Maguirc College	504	537	533

School Name	Academic Year		
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20P
St John's Business and Enterprise College	174	172	179
Sacred Heart College, Omagh	742	722	700
Holy Cross College	1583	1584	1533
Drumragh Integrated College	637	680	666
Omagh Academy	675	654	654
Strabane Academy	524	507	517
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Omagh	964	945	953
Loreto Grammar School	888	890	880

Source: Annual School Census

Figures relating to the 2019/20 academic year are provisional

- (ii) The projected enrolment number for schools in the West Tyrone constituency for the 2021/22 academic year is not available. However school population projections are published annually on the Department's website at a sectoral level only and therefore overall totals are available for the primary and post primary sectors. This information can be accessed at the web link below:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/School%20Population%20Projections%202018-19.xlsx>

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has for the rural proofing of small rural schools. (AQW 1934/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department's Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) is the framework, used by schools and school managing authorities, for assessing the viability and long-term sustainability of schools and it is a key driver for the Area Planning process.

The SSP, which has been rural proofed, recognises the needs of rural communities and this is reflected in a lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools, an accessibility criterion which provides guidance on home to school travel times and a 'strong links with the community' criterion which recognises the central place a school has for many communities.

Development Proposals are assessed against the criteria and indicators set out in the SSP and the proposer is required to confirm that the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (where applicable) have been considered.

My Department examines any rural considerations using available evidence as part of the advice provided to inform a decision, balancing rural considerations against any other statutory duties which may apply.

My Department will continue to meet its obligations to give due regard to rural proofing requirements.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education whether independent audits of children's attendance records are carried out. (AQW 1972/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Principal has overall responsibility for school attendance. The Board of Governors should provide support to the school by reviewing schools attendance reports and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to encourage good attendance. Teaching staff should regularly monitor attendance.

School Inspectors and officers of the Department of Education and the Education Authority are entitled to inspect both pupil attendance records and pupil registration records and to make extracts from them. The Principal is required to make such periodical or other returns from the registers to the Department of Education and the Education Authority as they may require.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale in which consideration will be given to the issues, potential costs and options to ensure similar action is taken on period poverty among young people, as was pledged in England in March 2019. (AQW 1974/17-22)

Mr Weir: DE is the policy lead in this area in respect of schools however "period-poverty" is a cross-cutting issue therefore decisions regarding funding are for the NI Executive to consider. I am aware of developments in England, Wales and Scotland to provide sanitary products free of charge through a range of bodies and approaches.

Provision for all schools in Northern Ireland would be dependent on funding and my officials are considering potential options and costs in this regard. I will consider the issues as soon as practicable.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Education Authority's definition of parental responsibility, and to detail the legislation under which that definition is clarified.

(AQW 2048/17-22)

Mr Weir: Parental Responsibility is defined in legislation under Article 6(1) of The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as 'all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property'.

As this definition is based in legislation, it should be used by any organisation referring to parental responsibility.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to outline the rules concerning marking pupils on a part-time timetable present for a full morning or afternoon, when they do not attend for the full duration of the morning or afternoon.

(AQW 2051/17-22)

Mr Weir: Department of Education Circular 2019/14 sets out how school's IT system (SIMS) should be updated when a child is on a reduced timetable. "Code ! – No Attendance required" should be used where attendance of a pupil may not be required in either the morning or afternoon session.

The circular specifically refers to pupils who may, for specific reasons, have been excepted from the statutory curriculum (reduced timetable) and assessment requirements on a temporary basis (as outlined in DE Circular 1990/45).

Department of Finance

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Finance whether he intends to adopt pay parity with Great Britain as policy across the entire public sector.

(AQW 1325/17-22)

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): There are around 120 different staff groups in the public sector, each with their own pay determination processes. I am responsible for setting the overarching public sector pay policy. However, Departments and other public sector employers are responsible for negotiating the individual pay awards for those groups. All of which face different labour market issues.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Finance how much was lost to the Executive in unpaid (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic rates in each of the last four financial years.

(AQW 1326/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The amount of unpaid domestic and non-domestic rates for the last four financial years is shown in the table below.

Financial Year	Domestic	Non-Domestic	Total
2018/19	£63,014,612	£61,726,043	£124,740,655
2017/18	£63,926,027	£62,329,166	£126,255,193
2016/17	£67,119,757	£64,509,557	£131,629,314
2015/16	£72,540,057	£70,908,982	£143,449,038

The table above shows the Year End (ie as at 31st March) debt position for domestic and non-domestic properties in each of the last four financial years, against annual collection challenges of over £1.3 billion. The figures include the regional and district element of the rate assessments.

LPS has reduced the Year End debt position over this last number of years, and the 2019 debt is the lowest it has been in a decade. It is important to note that Year End debt is carried forward into the following rating year and around 50% of this debt includes balances being paid through extended payment arrangements and/or subject to legal recovery proceedings.

Debt arises because ratepayers have not paid their rate bills. We must also accept that we are in a challenging economic environment and many people are struggling to pay their bills. LPS continues to see large numbers of individuals and businesses facing bankruptcy, administration and liquidation.

LPS will engage with ratepayers allowing them to pay smaller amounts, over a longer period of time. However this inevitably increases the level of rating debt at the end of the rating year.

While LPS will make efforts to support those who are struggling to pay, they must, and will, rigorously pursue those who don't pay. Where ratepayers fail to pay or do not enter into payment arrangements or break those arrangements, LPS will take Court action and seek to recover the debt through the Enforcement of Judgements Office or will instigate bankruptcy proceedings.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance whether his Department has discussed PEACE Plus funding with the UK Government; and whether sports clubs will be eligible for such funding.

(AQW 1403/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Department of Finance officials have discussed the PEACE PLUS Programme with officials in Whitehall, Dublin and the European Commission.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is carrying out an engagement process to help develop proposals for PEACE PLUS. All interested stakeholders (including sports clubs) are being encouraged to participate and help contribute to and shape the development of the Programme. No final decisions on the eligibility of potential funding recipients will be taken before the Programme is agreed and approved for commencement in 2021.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) how many Prison Service officers have been discharged from the Northern Ireland Prison Service due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and (ii) whether letters of discharge outline PTSD as the reason for discharge.

(AQW 1473/17-22)

Mr Murphy:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Prison Service is not informed of the specific medical reason when a Prison Officer is recommended for discharge from the Service. The decision to recommend discharge is made by the Medical Advisor in the Occupational Health Service and Human Resources is advised that the criteria for ill health retirement on medical grounds has been met.
- (ii) Discharge letters do not outline details of any medical conditions.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Finance what the impact of Brexit will be on the availability of (i) European Investment Bank funding; (ii) Council of Europe development funding; and (iii) other sources of European Union capital investment, for the purposes of de-carbonisation and emissions reduction.

(AQW 1514/17-22)

Mr Murphy:

- (i) The impact of no longer being a member of the European Investment Bank cannot be determined until there is more clarity on future access to European Investment Bank funding and/or any replacement or additional facilities introduced by the British Government.
- (ii) We are not a member of the Council of Europe Development Bank so the north has not historically benefitted from funding from this source.
- (iii) DoF is currently leading departments in assessing the impact from the loss of EU capital investment. We are also preparing plans to mitigate that impact including a bid to the Treasury.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Finance to list the 50 properties that have seen their Net Annual Value decrease the most as a result of Reval2020.

(AQW 1554/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The 50 properties that have seen their Net Annual Value (NAV) decrease the most as a result of Reval2020 are detailed in Annex A. I have interpreted "decrease the most" to mean the greatest reductions in NAV.

Annex A

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Monetary Change
607880	Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard	MILITARY BASE Shore Road Ballykinler Middle Ballykinler Downpatrick BT30 8EQ	£1,678,000	£453,000	−£1,225,000
950276	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	IKEA 306 Airport Road West Sydenham Intake Belfast BT3 9EJ	£2,374,000	£1,657,000	−£717,000
1054101	Commercial Unclassified	CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS BROCKAGHBOY WIND FARM 15 Drumbane Road Dunnaveenny Garvagh Coleraine BT51 5DR	£1,095,000	£464,500	−£630,500

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Monetary Change
1021776	Commercial Unclassified	GLENCONWAY WIND FARM N272 Baranait Road Glenconway Slaghtmanus Londonderry	£935,000	£531,000	-£404,000
1002927	Commercial Unclassified	N75 Lisdillon Road Castlewarren Ardmore Londonderry	£690,000	£320,000	-£370,000
1051379	Sporting Recreational	NEWRY LEISURE CENTRE 60 Cecil Street Lisdrumgullion Newry BT35 6AU	£1,136,000	£800,000 EXEMPT FROM RATES	-£336,000
1048323	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N12 Pullytean Road Ballymongan Killeter	£905,000	£580,000	-£325,000
849229	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO 24HR STORE Knocknagoney Road Knocknagoney Belfast BT4 2PW	£1,765,000	£1,492,000	-£273,000
1052700	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	UNIT 1 1 Faustina Retail Park Shantallow Londonderry BT48 8QN	£621,000	£349,000	-£272,000
996884	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO EXTRA 4 Marlborough Retail Park Balteagh Craigavon BT64 1AG	£1,298,000	£1,027,000	-£271,000
1064962	Commercial Unclassified	CORNAVARROW WIND FARM Cornavarrow Road Legphressy Drumquin	£798,000	£529,500	-£268,500
656830	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	SPRUCEFIELD SHOPPING CENTRE 1 Hillsborough Road Magherageery Lisburn BT27 5UJ	£2,505,000	£2,241,000	-£264,000
948665	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	H&M 8-10 Royal Avenue Town Parks Belfast BT1 1DA	£575,000	£314,000	-£261,000
1029692	Commercial Unclassified	DUNBEG WIND FARM N193 Windyhill Road Dunmore Limavady	£760,000	£499,500	-£260,500
1038716	Offices(Includes Banks and Post Offices)	HEALTH AND CARE CENTRE 86 Cushendall Road Town Parks Ballymena BT43 6HL	£506,000	£274,500	-£231,500
970967	Offices(Includes Banks and Post Offices)	HEALTH CENTRE THE KNOCKBREDA CENTRE 110 Saintfield Road Galwally Carryduff Belfast BT8 6SX	£414,000	£186,000	-£228,000
1048814	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM SLIEVE DIVENA 2 Aghnagar Road Altcloghfin Sixmilecross	£473,000	£254,500	-£218,500
957771	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N96A Cornahaltie Road Callagheen Belleek	£328,000	£113,500	-£214,500
1050086	Commercial Unclassified	ALTAVEEDAN WIND FARM N38 Shelton Road Altaveedan North Army Ballymoney	£495,000	£287,000	-£208,000

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Monetary Change
957766	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N29 Shantavny Road Altcloghfin Garvaghy	£405,000	£201,500	-£203,500
1004450	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	UNIT 1 NORTHCOTT SHOPPING CENTRE 78-88 Ballyclare Road Carnmoney Bog Newtownabbey BT36 5EA	£1,267,000	£1,072,000	-£195,000
1007094	Commercial Unclassified	CRIGHSHANE WINDFARM N73 Ballymongan Road Crighshane Killeter	£434,000	£239,500	-£194,500
1067667	Commercial Unclassified	TURBINES CASTLECRAIG WIND FARM Meenacloy Road Castlecraig Killen Castlederg	£596,000	£402,000	-£194,000
1003338	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO 1 Castlebawn Drive Commons Newtownards BT23 4XE	£1,247,000	£1,054,000	-£193,000
893224	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	SAINSBURY'S 5 Sprucefield Park Magherageery Lisburn BT27 5UQ	£1,321,000	£1,132,000	-£189,000
973411	Commercial Unclassified	GRUIG WIND FARM N212 Corkey Road Moneyneagh Cloughmills	£425,000	£237,000	-£188,000
573103	Commercial Unclassified	BELFAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT 166 Airport Road British Cruilin BT29 4JT	£3,935,000	£3,755,000	-£180,000
894028	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	B&Q 300 Airport Road West Sydenham Intake Belfast BT3 9EJ	£989,000	£812,000	-£177,000
858356	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO Unit 1 Church Road Drumnadrough Abbey Retail Park Newtownabbey BT36 7GU	£1,247,000	£1,075,000	-£172,000
1048922	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM EGLISH WIND FARM N6 Ballyartan Road Ballyartan Dunnamanagh	£396,000	£224,000	-£172,000
946814	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO 170 Newtownbreda Road Ballylenaghan Upper Belfast BT8 6PZ	£1,271,000	£1,100,000	-£171,000
1028501	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N152 Bradan Road Meenadoan Killen Castlederg	£317,000	£146,500	-£170,500
1053067	Commercial Unclassified	CROCKDUN WIND FARM, N214 Loughmacrory Road Copney Loughmacrory	£276,000	£112,000	-£164,000
993794	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	ASDA 150 Junction One Retail Park Towns Parks Antrim BT41 4LL	£1,231,000	£1,068,000	-£163,000
957345	Commercial Unclassified	TAPPAGHAN WIND FARM N21 Mountain Road Glenarn Lack	£484,000	£321,500	-£162,500

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Monetary Change
996189	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N237 Ecclesville Road Screggagh Fintona	£364,000	£202,500	-£161,500
1030512	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO Unit 2 5 Cascum Avenue Tullyear The Boulevard Outlet Park Banbridge BT32 4GN	£1,060,000	£901,500	-£158,500
704848	Law and Order Establishments	6 Maydown Road Templetown Londonderry BT47 6UF	£2,593,000	£2,436,000	-£157,000
990471	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM 253 Whitebridge Road Gleneeny Carrickmore	£339,000	£186,500	-£152,500
1003047	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	BEECH HALL 21 Andersonstown Road Ballydownfine Andersonstown Belfast BT11 9AF	£395,000	£243,500	-£151,500
767354	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	SAINSBURY'S Unit 14A FORESTSIDE SHOPPING CENTRE Saintfield Road Breda Castlereagh Belfast BT8 6FX	£1,060,000	£909,000	-£151,000
1059027	Commercial Unclassified	ELGINNY HILL WIND FARM N118 Longmore Road Correen Martinstown	£378,000	£229,500	-£148,500
962103	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	TESCO Unit 1 Springhill Retail Park Carnalea Bangor BT19 1ND	£982,000	£835,000	-£147,000
989795	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N120A Murley Road Edergole Fivemiletown	£294,000	£147,500	-£146,500
797342	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	ARGOS 15-19 William Street South Town Parks Belfast BT1 4AR	£425,000	£279,000	-£146,000
1048320	Commercial Unclassified	GORTFINBAR WIND FARM N233 Whitebridge Road Cloghfin Carrickmore	£291,000	£145,000	-£146,000
390634	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	ASDA 1 Ring Road Lodge Coleraine BT52 1QP	£1,084,000	£939,000	-£145,000
1007099	Commercial Unclassified	CHURCH HILL WINDFARM N25 Meenamullin Road Meenamullan Castlederg	£292,000	£147,500	-£144,500
1002801	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	SAINSBURY'S 10 Balloo Link Corporation Bangor BT19 7HJ	£889,000	£746,000	-£143,000
1046068	Commercial Unclassified	WIND FARM N25 Meenamullin Road Seegronan Castlederg	£290,000	£147,500	-£142,500

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Finance to list the 50 properties that have seen their Net Annual Value increase the most as a result of Reval2020.

(AQW 1555/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The 50 properties that have seen their Net Annual Value increase the most as a result of Reval2020 are shown in Annex A. I have interpreted "increase the most" to mean the largest monetary increases in NAV.

It is important to note that many of these premises benefit from (a) rating relief at 70% as qualifying industrial properties and (b) 100% exemption from rates. Those properties are highlighted in Annex A.

Annex A

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Rate Relief	Monetary Change
214042	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL Grosvenor Road Town Parks The Royal Hospitals Belfast BT12 6BA	£3,425,000	£4,970,000		£1,545,000
654068	Law and Order Establishments	MAGAHBERRY PRISON 13 Old Road Magheraliskmisk Ballinderry Upper Lisburn BT28 2NF	£2,510,000	£3,615,000		£1,105,000
482935	Licensed Accommodation	GALGORM RESORT AND SPA 136 Fenaghy Road Fenaghy Cullybackey Ballymena BT42 1EA	£425,000	£1,300,000		£875,000
1059303	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	OFFICE BUILDING 10 Mays Meadow Town Parks Belfast BT1 3PH	£1,476,000	£2,325,000		£849,000
412914	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL 24 Glenshane Road Altnagelvin Altnagelvin Hospital Londonderry BT47 6GT	£2,969,000	£3,778,000		£809,000
198062	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	BELFAST CITY HOSPITAL 51 Lisburn Road, Malone Lower Belfast BT9 7AB	£2,637,000	£3,433,000		£796,000
560844	Sporting Recreational	VALLEY LEISURE CENTRE 40 Church Road Drumnadrough Newtownabbey BT36 7LJ	£353,000	£1,092,000	Exempt	£739,000
104186	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	THE ULSTER HOSPITAL 700 Upper Newtownards Road Ballyregan The Ulster Hospital Dundonald Belfast BT16 1RH	£2,038,000	£2,761,000		£723,000
462296	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	THE CECIL WARD BUILDING 4-10 Linenhall Street Town Parks Belfast BT2 8BP	£1,885,000	£2,587,000		£702,000
686445	Utilities	1 Virgin Media Telecoms Network Belfast Belfast	£1,750,000	£2,424,291		£674,291

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Rate Relief	Monetary Change
1018666	Sporting Recreational	BANGOR AURORA 3 Valentine Road Corporation Bangor BT20 4JH	£1,660,000	£2,310,000	Exempt	£650,000
955006	Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	UNIT 41 UG 1 Victoria Square Town Parks Belfast BT1 4QG	£1,400,000	£2,003,000		£603,000
1007745	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	SOUTH WEST ACUTE HOSPITAL 124 Irvinestown Road Drumcoo Enniskillen BT74 6DN	£2,752,000	£3,355,000		£603,000
773957	Non Sporting Rec Facility	ICC BELFAST / WATERFRONT HALL 2 Lanyon Place Town Parks Belfast BT1 3WH	£1,700,000	£2,230,000		£530,000
1025183	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	LANYON PLAZA 7 Lanyon Place Town Parks Belfast BT1 3LP	£1,269,000	£1,735,000		£466,000
1049570	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	OMAGH ENHANCED LOCAL HOSPITAL 7 Donaghane Road Cranny Omagh BT79 0FL	£1,098,000	£1,512,000		£414,000
211982	Miscellaneous Public Service Properties	WASTE WATER TREATMENT PLANT 2 Herdman Channel Road Low-Wood Intake Belfast BT3 9LG	£1,712,000	£2,120,000		£408,000
852110	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	LAGANSIDE COURTS 45 Oxford Street Town Parks Belfast BT1 3LL	£1,430,000	£1,835,000		£405,000
846787	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	OFFICE 3RD - 6TH WATERFRONT PLAZA 8 Laganbank Road Town Parks Belfast BT1 3LR	£775,500	£1,179,000		£403,500
707299	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	ANTRIM AREA HOSPITAL 45 Bush Road Brettens Walls Antrim Hospital Antrim BT41 2RL	£1,640,000	£2,037,000		£397,000
650163	Sporting Recreational	LAGAN VALLEY LEISUREPLEX 18 Lisburn Leisure Park Old Warren Lisburn BT28 1LP	£703,000	£1,074,000	Exempt	£371,000
255350	Schools etc	ELMS VILLAGE QUEENS ELMS 78 Malone Road Malone Lower Belfast BT9 5BW	£748,500	£1,118,000	Exempt	£369,500

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Rate Relief	Monetary Change
919438	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	INVEST NI 1 Bedford Square Town Parks Belfast BT2 7ES	£1,052,000	£1,417,000		£365,000
230978	Manufactories	BOMBARDIER 2 Airport Road Ballymacarret Intake Belfast BT3 9DY	£1,582,000	£1,946,000	Industrial	£364,000
836410	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	CAUSEWAY HOSPITAL 4 Newbridge Road Lodge Coleraine BT52 1HS	£1,052,000	£1,381,000		£329,000
226121	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	MUSGRAVE PARK HOSPITAL Stockmans Lane Ballygammon Musgrave Park Hospital Belfast BT9 7JB	£1,240,000	£1,567,000		£327,000
902851	Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	BANK OF IRELAND 1 Donegall Square South Town Parks Belfast BT1 5JA	£768,000	£1,090,000		£322,000
988907	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	DOWNE HOSPITAL 2 Struell Wells Road Russell's Quarter Downpatrick BT30 6RL	£765,000	£1,085,000		£320,000
272989	Schools etc	CAMPBELL COLLEGE Belmont Road Ballycloghan Belfast BT4 2ND	£677,500	£994,000	Exempt	£316,500
255541	Miscellaneous Public Service Properties	THE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCE CENTRE 18A Newforge Lane Malone Upper Belfast BT9 5PX	£1,105,000	£1,400,000		£295,000
261968	Licensed Accommodation	EUROPA HOTEL BELFAST 11 Great Victoria Street Town Parks BELFAST BT2 7AP	£515,000	£800,000		£285,000
980661	Licensed Accommodation	FITZWILLIAM HOTEL 1-3 Great Victoria Street Town Parks Belfast BT2 7BQ	£247,500	£520,000		£272,500
663826	Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard	THIEPVAL BARRACKS 33-35 Magheralave Road Magheralave (Upper Belfast) Lisburn BT28 3BW	£2,330,000	£2,600,000		£270,000
1063725	Schools etc	STUDENT ACCOMMODATION 20 Great Patrick Street Town Parks Belfast BT1 2LT	£368,000	£634,500		£266,500

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Rate Relief	Monetary Change
274948	Miscellaneous Public Service Properties	AGRI-FOOD AND BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE 12 Stoney Road Ballymiscaw Belfast BT16 1UP	£735,000	£1,000,000		£265,000
679720	Sporting Recreational	ANTRIM FORUM 14 Lough Road Balloo Antrim BT41 4DQ	£435,500	£692,000	Exempt	£256,500
226543	Schools etc	RATHMORE GRAMMAR SCHOOL Kingsway Dunmurry Finaghy Belfast BT10 0LF	£505,500	£761,000	Exempt	£255,500
1051812	Non Sporting Rec Facility	EIKON EXHIBITION CENTRE, 94C Halftown Road Maze Lisburn BT27 5RF	£539,000	£794,000	Part Exempt	£255,000
966416	Licensed Accommodation	MERCHANT HOTEL 35-39 Waring Street Town Parks Belfast BT1 2DY	£550,000	£805,000		£255,000
1009524	Non Sporting Rec Facility	TITANIC BELFAST 1 Olympic Way QUEEN'S ISLAND Queen's Island Belfast BT3 9EP	£895,000	£1,149,000	Exempt	£254,000
512416	Sporting Recreational	CARRICKFERGUS LEISURE CENTRE 4 Prince William Way North East Division Carrickfergus BT38 7HP	£258,500	£506,000	Exempt	£247,500
187341	Schools etc	STRATHEARN SCHOOL 188 Belmont Road Strandtown Belfast BT4 2AU	£477,500	£722,000	Exempt	£244,500
332820	Schools etc	ST PATRICK'S ACADEMY 35-37 Killymeal Road Killymeal Dungannon BT71 6DS	£546,500	£790,500	Exempt	£244,000
1012192	Schools etc	OUR LADY AND ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE 120 Gilnahirk Road Gortgrib Belfast BT5 7DL	£566,500	£810,500	Exempt	£244,000
1002500	Schools etc	BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE 7 Queens Road Ballymacarret Intake Belfast BT3 9DT	£561,500	£805,500		£244,000

Prop ID	Class of property	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	Rate Relief	Monetary Change
427771	Miscellaneous Public Service Properties	CULMORE WASTER WATER TREATMENT WORKS N1 Coney Road Culmore Londonderry	£441,500	£683,500		£242,000
977226	Libraries etc	THE BRAID MUSEUM & ARTS CENTRE / BALLYMENA TOWN HALL 129 Bridge Street Town Parks Ballymena BT43 5AH	£651,000	£891,500	Exempt	£240,500
661199	Schools etc	SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE 39 Castle Street Lisnagarvy Lisburn BT27 4SP	£424,500	£656,500		£232,000
532869	Miscellaneous Public Service Properties	SEWAGE WORKS N103-105 Shore Road Ballygolan Jordanstown	£425,000	£656,500		£231,500
97858	Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	HOSPITAL OFFICES GROUNDS DAVIS BUILDING 301 Saintfield Road Ballydollahan Knockbracken Healthcare Park Belfast BT8 8SG	£739,500	£970,000		£230,500

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Finance to list (i) the revised Net Asset Value of each sports club or facility following Reval2020; (ii) the Net Asset Value of each club or facility prior to Reval2020; and (iii) the percentage change in each case. (AQW 1556/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The 1,108 sport and recreation properties you have requested information for are in Annex A showing the current Net Annual Value (NAV), the revised draft NAV following Reval2020 and the percentage change in each case. I have interpreted "sports club or facility" to mean properties that LPS has classified as a property used for a prescribed sport or recreation for rates purposes.

It is important to note that many of these premises benefit from (a) 100% exemption from rates on qualifying areas, (b) rating relief on all or part of the premises at 80% as sport and recreation facilities, or (c) rating relief on all or part of the premises at 100% as Community Amateur Sports Clubs under the provisions of Articles 31 and 41 of the Rates (NI) Order 1977. These are identified in the list at Annex A as EX for exempt properties, SR for premises which benefit from 80% sport and recreation relief and CASC for premises which benefit from 100% relief for Community Amateur Sports Clubs.

Annex A

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
560844	VALLEY LEISURE CENTRE 40 Church Road Drumnadrough Newtownabbey BT36 7LJ	£353,000	£1,092,000	EX	209.35
593075	N35 Lurgan Road Ballynaris Dromore	£45,100	£134,000	EX	197.12
787266	24 Madden Road Ballymore Tandragee Craigavon BT62 2DG	£46,600	£128,500	EX	175.75
577934	53 Main Street Ballytromery Crumlin BT29 4UR	£4,600	£12,440	SR	170.43

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
624199	21 Castle Island Road Castle Island Downpatrick BT30 7LD	£16,400	£43,200	SR	163.41
986579	68 Bluestone Road Moyraverty Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8RX	£4,950	£12,700		156.57
601864	EAST DOWN YACHT CLUB 61 Comber Road Moymore Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9PA	£8,800	£21,550	SR	144.89
664890	11 Fountain Hill Towns Parks Antrim BT41 1LZ	£10,200	£23,500	EX	130.39
610243	63 Church Street Towns Parks Antrim BT41 4BE	£1,700	£3,900	SR	129.41
610260	76 Church Street Towns Parks Antrim BT41 4BA	£2,060	£4,700	SR	128.16
1001160	N96A Derryane Road Derryadd Dungannon	£1,000	£2,150	SR	115
786525	25 Ballygore Road Rathenraw Antrim BT41 2RN	£7,100	£15,100	EX	112.68
798126	PLAYING FIELD N294 Drumrane Road Bonnanaboigh Dungiven	£2,450	£5,150	EX	110.2
900472	KILREA SPORTS COMPLEX Craiglea Gardens Kilrea Coleraine BT51 5QZ	£14,900	£30,600	EX	105.37
1000505	55A Upper Gransha Road Gransha Bangor BT19 7QE	£8,300	£16,500		98.8
463630	32A Dergbrough Road Dergbrough Plumbridge Omagh BT79 8JX	£5,250	£10,400	EX	98.1
512416	CARRICKFERGUS LEISURE CENTRE 4 Prince William Way Carrickfergus BT38 7HP	£258,500	£506,000	EX	95.74
699959	BALLYMACARRETT LEISURE CENTRE 1 Ballymacarrett Walkway Ballymacarrett BELFAST BT4 1SX	£31,000	£60,000	EX	93.55
1012837	SHOOTING RANGE N18 Aughnalooopy Road Aughnalooopy Kilkeel	£700	£1,350		92.86
577881	2A Main Street Ballytromery Crumlin BT29 4UP	£110,000	£203,000	EX	84.55
1025107	EDENVILLA MULTISPORTS PITCH 10 Bachelors Walk Seagoe Upper Portadown Craigavon BT63 5BQ	£8,750	£16,100	EX	84
195806	97 Balfour Avenue Malone Lower Belfast BT7 2EW	£66,000	£121,000	EX	83.33
693671	159 Ballygawley Road Edenacrannon Dungannon BT70 1RX	£640	£1,150	EX	79.69
992907	60A Quarry Road Gulladuff Knockcloghrim Magherafelt BT45 8NS	£11,300	£20,100	EX	77.88
581397	BANBRIDGE LEISURE CENTRE 15 Downshire Road Ballyvally Banbridge BT32 3JY	£142,500	£253,000	EX	77.54
982909	43 Loughmagarry Road Cabragh Ballymena BT43 6TW	£2,200	£3,850		75

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
709677	LEISURE CENTRE COOKSTOWN LEISURE CENTRE 76 Fountain Road Coolnafranky Cookstown BT80 8QF	£211,500	£365,000	EX	72.58
986549	7A Derryneskan Road Derrykeeran Portadown Craigavon BT62 1UH	£13,500	£22,800		68.89
178628	15 Falls Road Edenderry Belfast BT12 4PP	£135,500	£226,500	EX	67.16
490267	37 Old Ballymoney Road Ballyloughan Ballymena BT43 6LY	£21,000	£35,100	EX	67.14
470119	HANDBALL COURT 15A Termon Road Aghagogan Carrickmore	£2,500	£4,150	SR	66
1062497	PLAYING FIELDS N59 Chanterhill Road Moneynoe Glebe or Chanterhill Enniskillen	£47,800	£79,100	EX	65.48
147466	130 Rubane Road Kirkistown Kircubbin Newtownards BT22 1AU	£39,550	£65,200	SR	64.85
998241	54 Station Road Walworth Ballykelly Limavady BT49 9HU	£1,200	£1,950	SR	62.5
1032452	CHANGING FACILITIES GLEBESIDE PARK 71A Alexandra Avenue Town Parks Ballymoney BT53 6ET	£1,550	£2,500	EX	61.29
1037763	21 Sloughan Road Killen Drumquin Omagh BT78 4PF	£560	£900		60.71
365819	14A Gortmore Gardens Gortmore Omagh BT78 5DZ	£380	£610	SR	60.53
679720	RECREATION CENTRE 14 Lough Road Balloo Antrim BT41 4DQ	£435,500	£692,000	EX	58.9
719202	60 Church Road Carrickmaddyroe Boardmills Lisburn BT27 6UP	£18,900	£29,900		58.2
202103	LOUGHSIDE RECREATION CENTRE Shore Road Low-Wood Belfast BT15 4HP	£67,000	£105,500	EX	57.46
450342	2 St. Lurachs Road Craigadick Maghera BT46 5JE	£12,000	£18,600	EX	55
711282	24 Ballyskeagh Road Ballyskeagh Lisburn BT27 5SY	£11,500	£17,800		54.78
650163	18 Lisburn Leisure Park Old Warren Lisburn BT28 1LP	£703,000	£1,074,000	EX	52.77
700421	BRUNSWICK SUPERBOWL 22 Pennyburn Industrial Estate Pennyburn LONDONDERRY BT48 0LU	£72,400	£110,500		52.62
1053702	24 Ballymaconaghy Road Lisnabreeny Belfast BT8 6SB	£2,600	£3,950		51.92
1014108	48 Derryhirk Road Derrycorry South Dungannon BT71 6NH	£5,900	£8,950		51.69
705321	UNIT 5 1 Altona Road Largymore Altona Business Park Lisburn BT27 5QB	£15,800	£23,900		51.27
982936	94 Racavan Road Ballynulto Broughshane Ballymena BT42 4QZ	£960	£1,450	SR	51.04

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
126654	PAVILION & COMMONS N70A Millisle Road Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee	£7,550	£11,400	EX	50.99
604593	3-5 Ardnabannon Road Ballybannan Castlewellan BT31 9EN	£56,500	£85,000		50.44
1071929	EIRE OG AN CHARRAIG MHOR HURLING AND CAMOGIE CLUB 25A Termon Road Aghagogan Carrickmore Omagh BT79 9JR	£6,450	£9,650	CASC	49.61
633632	CUMANN LAMH DHEARG 168 Upper Springfield Road Hannahstown Hannahstown Belfast BT17 0LZ	£19,500	£29,100	SR	49.23
1060500	101 North Street Demesne Lurgan Craigavon BT67 9AH	£7,990	£11,905	CASC	49
1053969	OLYMPIA LEISURE CENTRE 10 WINDSOR WAY Malone Lower Belfast BT12 6HR	£326,500	£484,500	EX	48.39
172822	BALLYSILLAN LEISURE CENTRE Ballysillan Road Old Park Belfast BT14 7QQ	£115,500	£171,000	EX	48.05
1001830	SEYCON PARK PLAYING FIELD N14 Riverside Kilmakee Dunmurry	£2,650	£3,900	EX	47.17
997155	167 Shore Road Drumenagh Ballyronan Magherafelt BT45 6LS	£850	£1,250	SR	47.06
774635	PAVILION & PLAYING FIELDS 20A The Links Strangford Lower Strangford	£2,550	£3,750	EX	47.06
563743	BALLYEARL LEISURE CENTRE 585 Doagh Road Ballyearl Newtownabbey BT36 5RZ	£47,000	£69,100	EX	47.02
338412	513 Lough Shore Road Legg Belleek Enniskillen BT74 5NH	£1,100	£1,600	SR	45.45
275384	RECREATION CENTRE AVONIEL LEISURE CENTRE 24 Avoniel Road Ballymacarret Belfast BT5 4SF	£108,000	£157,000	EX	45.37
1032446	DERVOCK COMMUNITY CENTRE 190 Knock Road Ballyrathahan Upper Dervock Ballymoney BT53 8BB	£10,700	£15,500	EX	44.86
343212	433 Lough Shore Road Drumcrow East Derrygonnelly Enniskillen BT93 7FJ	£1,350	£1,950	SR	44.44
143173	BOAT HOUSE 2 Seafront Road Ballycultra Holywood BT18 0BB	£8,850	£12,700	SR	43.5
1047323	CHANGING FACILITIES N38 Orior Park Clogharevan Newry	£1,150	£1,650		43.48
376218	51 Glasgort Road Landagivey Aghadowey Coleraine BT51 4AE	£8,450	£12,100		43.2
24253	LURGAN SWIMMING POOL Robert Street Ballyblagh Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8BE	£96,900	£138,500	EX	42.93
123379	COMBER LEISURE CENTRE 15 Castle Street Town Parks Comber Newtownards BT23 5DY	£104,000	£148,500	EX	42.79

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690550	162 Grosvenor Road Town Parks Belfast BT12 5AT	£65,000	£92,800	EX	42.77
985313	LEISURE CENTRE THE TORRENT COMPLEX 9 Hillview Avenue Donaghmore Donaghmore Dungannon BT70 3DL	£52,800	£75,300	EX	42.61
313328	1ST FLOOR 5 Springhill Road Moneymore Moneymore Magherafelt BT45 7NG	£590	£840	SR	42.37
588400	RIFLE PARK Arderys Lane Ballyvally Banbridge BT32 3RF	£10,200	£14,500	SR	42.16
999422	BALYMOTE SPORTS & WELLBEING CENTRE 96 Glebetown Drive Ballyvange Downpatrick BT30 6PZ	£59,500	£84,400	EX	41.85
603888	8 Downpatrick Road Ballylone Big Ballynahinch BT24 8SH	£3,600	£5,100	SR	41.67
865957	1 Glen Road Heights Ballymoney Andersonstown Belfast BT11 8RB	£8,300	£11,650	SR	40.36
820126	DUNGANNON PARK PAVILLION Ballynorthland Park Moygashel Dungannon BT71 6BT	£23,250	£32,500	EX	39.78
982917	115 Madden Road Cargans Tandragee Craigavon BT62 2DJ	£7,000	£9,750	EX	39.29
723819	101 Springwell Road Groomsport Bangor BT19 6LX	£6,750	£9,400		39.26
486933	PLAYING FIELD 85 Larne Street Ballykeel Ballymena	£970	£1,350	EX	39.18
1018666	BANGOR AURORA 3 Valentine Road Corporation Bangor BT20 4JH	£1,660,000	£2,310,000	EX	39.16
1010946	48 Cookstown Road Coltrim Moneymore Magherafelt BT45 7QF	£8,000	£11,100		38.75
1018460	MONEYSLANE FOOTBALL CLUB 6A Moneyslane Road Moneyslane Ballyward Castlewellan BT31 9PT	£4,620	£6,400	SR	38.53
161963	N13 Seacliff Road Corporation Bangor	£130	£180	SR	38.46
114414	BALLYNAFEIGH METHODIST CHURCH TENNIS CLUB 35A Wynchurch Park Ballymacconaghy Belfast BT6 0JL	£6,120	£8,460	SR	38.24
477760	SEVEN TOWERS LEISURE CENTRE Trostan Avenue Town Parks Ballymena BT43 7BL	£239,500	£330,500	EX	38
577994	26 Mill Road Ballytromery Crumlin BT29 4XL	£7,150	£9,850	SR	37.76
576190	47 Moira Road Ballydonaghy Glenavy Crumlin BT29 4JL	£7,150	£9,850		37.76
478985	150 Fenaghy Road Cullybackey Cullybackey Ballymena BT42 1DZ	£2,000	£2,750	SR	37.5
250670	ORMEAU PARK Ormeau Road Ballynafoy Ormeau Belfast	£212,300	£291,200	EX	37.16
743324	45 Castle Road Kilbegs Randalstown Antrim BT41 4NA	£84,600	£115,500	EX	36.52

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620974	46 Crossgar Road Saintfield Parks Saintfield Ballynahinch BT24 7JE	£2,500	£3,400	SR	36
77774	PETER MCPARLAND PARK PLAYING FIELDS N3 Barley Lane Ballynacraig Newry	£1,250	£1,700	EX	36
824322	MONEYMORE RECREATION CENTRE 2 Moneyhaw Road Moneymore Moneymore Magherafelt BT45 7XJ	£45,400	£61,700	EX	35.9
989649	UNIT 4 GROVE WELLBEING CENTRE 120 York Road Skegoneill Belfast BT15 3HF	£315,500	£427,500	EX	35.5
599479	1 Ballydugan Industrial Estate Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick BT30 6TE	£7,850	£10,600	EX	35.03
35929	ORCHARD LEISURE CENTRE 37-39 Folly Lane Corporation Armagh BT60 1AT	£197,500	£266,000	EX	34.68
865679	PAVILION BELFAST HARLEQUINS SPORTS CLUB 45A Deramore Park Malone Upper Belfast BT9 5JX	£46,300	£62,200	SR	34.34
654417	LISBURN CRICKET AND LAWN TENNIS CLUB N Belfast Road Lisnagarvy Lisburn	£5,850	£7,850	SR	34.19
26053	80 Jervis Street Clownagh Portadown Craigavon BT62 3HD	£4,400	£5,900	EX	34.09
765010	51 Windmill Street Ballynahinch Ballynahinch BT24 8HB	£31,300	£41,900	EX	33.87
165150	DUNDONALD INTERNATIONAL ICE BOWL 111 Old Dundonald Road Ballyhanwood Dundonald Belfast BT16 1XT	£369,500	£494,500	EX	33.83
837252	BANGOR SPORTSPLEX 292 Old Belfast Road Bangor Bog Bangor BT19 1RE	£230,000	£307,500	EX	33.7
401990	6 Corrick Road Straw Draperstown Magherafelt BT45 7BD	£18,850	£25,100	SR	33.16
793402	NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL Ballynure Road Ballyclare Ballyclare BT39 9YU	£148,000	£197,000	EX	33.11
774502	43A Kilmore Road Lissara Crossgar Downpatrick BT30 9HJ	£6,950	£9,250	EX	33.09
479939	141 Cushendall Road Dunclug Ballymena BT43 6HB	£5,200	£6,900	EX	32.69
698973	KILKEEL LEISURE CENTRE AND SWIMMING POOL Mourne Esplanade Magheramurphy Kilkeel Newry BT34 4DB	£87,800	£116,500	EX	32.69
634969	40 Queensway Derryaghy Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9HG	£7,000	£9,250	SR	32.14
1032457	CHANGING FACILITIES MEGAW PARK N21 Coleraine Road Town Parks Ballymoney	£4,200	£5,550	EX	32.14
370009	1 Erne Road Cornagrade Enniskillen BT74 6NN	£40,000	£52,600	SR	31.5
434341	48 Richill Park Lisnagelvin Londonderry BT47 5QZ	£72,500	£95,300	EX	31.45

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664789	104 Main Street Ballytromery Crumlin BT29 4UU	£990	£1,300	CASC	31.31
759028	153A Ballyrobert Road Lisnalinchy Ballyclare BT39 9RT	£24,000	£31,500		31.25
396954	COLERAINE YACHT CLUB 64A Portstewart Road Ballysally Coleraine BT52 1EY	£4,850	£6,350	SR	30.93
61398	61 Patrick Street Ballinlare Newry BT35 8TR	£103,500	£135,500	EX	30.92
163423	BYRON COURT 1 Kinnegar Road Holywood Holywood BT18 9JN	£13,100	£17,150	SR	30.92
310023	2 Cemetery Road Gortallowry Cookstown BT80 8EA	£12,950	£16,940	SR	30.81
929494	AGRICULTURAL SHOW GROUND 61-91 Ballycastle Road Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 2DY	£10,100	£13,200		30.69
163841	LEISURE CENTRE QUEEN'S LEISURE COMPLEX 1A Sullivan Close Holywood Holywood BT18 9HL	£67,500	£88,000	EX	30.37
120465	115 Milltown Road Ballynavally Belfast BT8 7XP	£122,900	£160,200	SR	30.35
320853	1 Caledon Road Derrycush Aghnacloy BT69 6AL	£3,300	£4,300	SR	30.3
945317	SALTO GYMNASTICS CENTRE Warren Park Old Warren Lisburn BT28 1LW	£57,000	£74,100	EX	30
529059	LARNE LEISURE CENTRE 28-30 Tower Road Curran and Drumaliss Larne BT40 1AB	£181,000	£235,000	EX	29.83
519587	PAVILION CLUB HOUSE 8 Upper Cairncastle Road Town Parks Larne BT40 2DT	£5,700	£7,400	EX	29.82
668537	PAVILION 13-23 Knutsford Drive Old Park Belfast BT14 6LZ	£8,050	£10,450	SR	29.81
1047749	ST MALACHY'S CHURCH BUILDING 22 Alfred Street Town Parks Belfast BT2 8EN	£3,700	£4,800	EX	29.73
1054018	30 Gortfin Street Edenderry Belfast BT12 7BN	£5,050	£6,550	SR	29.7
93387	64-70 William Street Corporation South Newtownards BT23 4EJ	£226,500	£293,500	EX	29.58
458260	WILLIAM STREET SWIMMING BATHS William Street Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 9AD	£37,400	£48,400	EX	29.41
431390	SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL CLUB Gransha Park Gransha Londonderry BT47 6TG	£17,900	£23,150	SR	29.33
647880	15 Ballinderry Park Knockmore Lisburn BT28 1ST	£36,300	£46,900	EX	29.2

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383110	COLERAINE LEISURE CENTRE Railway Road Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 1PE	£122,000	£157,500	EX	29.1
817747	THE BRIDGE COMMUNITY CENTRE 27 Braeside Gardens Corporation Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9QE	£38,500	£49,700	EX	29.09
442183	418 Ballyquin Road Lackagh Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4NQ	£5,850	£7,550	SR	29.06
835096	2B Burn Road Loy Cookstown BT80 8DN	£28,950	£37,350	SR	29.02
640286	95 Lisburn Road Ballypitmave Glenavy Crumlin BT29 4NY	£10,000	£12,900	SR	29
619365	MOURNE GOLF CLUB 38 Golf Links Road Murlough Upper Newcastle BT33 0AN	£13,650	£17,600	SR	28.94
688532	WHITEROCK LEISURE CENTRE 10 Whiterock Close Ballymurphy Belfast BT12 7RG	£135,000	£174,000	EX	28.89
251181	STAND 134 Mount Merrion Avenue Ballynafoy Belfast BT6 0DG	£340,000	£438,000		28.82
1037314	HANDBALL COURT 174 Loughmacrory Road Loughmacrory Loughmacrory	£3,300	£4,250	EX	28.79
998261	31A Tievenny Road Killeen Victoria Bridge Strabane BT82 9LW	£750	£965	SR	28.67
998707	N86A Gillygooley Road Culbuck Omagh	£420	£540		28.57
619364	LADIES' CLUB HOUSE Golf Links Road Murlough Upper Newcastle BT33 0AN	£3,150	£4,050	SR	28.57
638517	FULLERTON PARK PAVILION Glenburn Road Dunmurry Dunmurry	£12,300	£15,800	EX	28.46
512414	1A Prince William Way North East Division Carrickfergus BT38 7HP	£1,150	£1,475	SR	28.26
982845	CELTIC PARK 2 Lone Moor Road Ballymagowan Londonderry BT48 9LA	£32,200	£41,300	SR	28.26
165227	LEISURE CENTRE LOUGH MOSS CENTRE Hillsborough Road Mealough Carryduff Belfast BT8 8HR	£152,500	£195,500	EX	28.2
1070561	1 DAIRY HALL LANE Corporation South Newtownards BT23 4DB	£640,000	£819,500	EX	28.05
161989	62-64 Seacliff Road Corporation Bangor BT20 5EZ	£920	£1,175	SR	27.72
85191	THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE 1 Tullynakill Road Ballydrain Comber Newtownards BT23 6EJ	£2,350	£3,000		27.66
685094	84 Ballygelagh Road Kirkistown Kircubbin Newtownards BT22 1AE	£9,250	£11,800		27.57
271402	SHANKILL LEISURE CENTRE 100 Shankill Road Town Parks Belfast BT13 2BD	£189,000	£241,000	EX	27.51
9583	PORTADOWN PUBLIC PARK Park Road Garvaghy Portadown Craigavon BT62 1BH	£11,300	£14,400	EX	27.43

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528600	82 Coastguard Road Curran and Drumaliss Larne BT40 1AU	£1,650	£2,100	SR	27.27
787523	67 New Line	£2,200	£2,800	EX	27.27
583172	39 Ballela Road Ballooly Banbridge BT32 3TF	£3,500	£4,450	SR	27.14
332496	DUNGANNON LEISURE CENTRE 5 Circular Road Drumcoo Dungannon BT71 6BH	£149,500	£190,000	EX	27.09
431161	MAYDOWN WORKS 60 Clooney Road Carrakeel Londonderry BT47 6TH	£24,100	£30,600	SR	26.97
510617	13 Quayside Carrickfergus Carrickfergus BT38 8BE	£15,300	£19,350	SR	26.47
1013102	21 Bannagh Beg Road Bannagh More Kesh Enniskillen BT93 1AA	£8,150	£10,300		26.38
754266	UNIT A 5 Barrack Square Gortgonis Coalisland Dungannon BT71 4JG	£3,300	£4,150	SR	25.76
638081	23 Ashley Park Dunmurry Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9EH	£8,710	£10,950	SR	25.72
468054	RIVERSDALE LEISURE CENTRE Lisnafin Park Magirr Strabane BT82 9DQ	£82,400	£103,500	EX	25.61
639783	ST. PATRICKS HALL 26 Chapel Road Aghadolgan Glenavy Crumlin BT29 4LY	£2,150	£2,700	SR	25.58
1009621	42A Horn Drive Ballymoney Belfast BT11 9GS	£5,700	£7,150	EX	25.44
215581	63 Andersonstown Road Ballydownfine Andersonstown Belfast BT11 9AH	£20,700	£25,900	SR	25.12
865112	ARENA ODYSSEY PAVILION 2 Queens Quay Ballymacarret Intake Belfast BT3 9QQ	£680,000	£850,000		25
664457	23A Church Street Ballynahinch Ballynahinch BT24 8AF	£1,000	£1,250	SR	25
641581	43 Glenmore Park Lambeg South Lisburn BT27 4RT	£34,200	£42,700	EX	24.85
411896	17 Moyle Road Grange Newtownstewart Omagh BT78 4AP	£33,300	£41,400	EX	24.32
169618	96 Templemore Avenue Ballymacarret Belfast BT5 4FW	£56,200	£69,800	EX	24.2
844662	ABBNEY VILLA FOOTBALL CLUB HOUSE 91 Abbey Road Ballymacrui Millisle Newtownards BT22 2DG	£5,000	£6,200	SR	24
499019	2 Mary Street Town Parks Ballycastle BT54 6QH	£3,350	£4,150	EX	23.88
338433	BOAT HOUSE 531 Lough Shore Road Drumbadmeen Belleek Enniskillen BT74 5NH	£1,050	£1,300	SR	23.81
733074	141 Ballinlea Road Gracehill Ballymoney BT53 8PX	£27,300	£33,700		23.44

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504924	1-2 Marine Parade White Head Whitehead Carrickfergus BT38 9QP	£7,900	£9,750	SR	23.42
499541	SPORTS HALL DUNLUCE PARISH HALL 13 Priestland Road Glebe Bushmills BT57 8QP	£620	£765	SR	23.39
1027937	66 Loughside Road Garvros Garrison Enniskillen BT93 4EY	£2,800	£3,450	SR	23.21
647810	115 Blacks Road Dunmurry Belfast BT10 0NF	£12,100	£14,900	EX	23.14
363413	OMAGH LEISURE COMPLEX 9 Old Mountfield Road Lisnamallard Omagh BT79 7EG	£365,000	£449,000	EX	23.01
987552	MEADOWBANK SPORTS ARENA 45 Ballyronan Road Town Parks of Magherafelt Magherafelt BT45 6EW	£552,500	£676,500	EX	22.44
484133	143 Glenravel Road Craigdunloof Cargan Ballymena BT43 6RA	£20,600	£25,200	EX	22.33
534579	2A Avondale Drive Ballyclare Avondale Business Park Ballyclare BT39 9AU	£1,350	£1,650	SR	22.22
983460	SPORTS GROUND PORTSTEWART FOOTBALL CLUB St. Johns Close Mullaghacall North Portstewart BT55 7HJ	£11,000	£13,400	SR	21.82
998255	60 Magherafelt Road Ballinderry Tobermore Magherafelt BT45 5PJ	£550	£670	SR	21.82
37641	ATHLETIC GROUNDS AND CLUBHOUSE 17 Dalton Park Corporation Armagh BT60 4AQ	£37,700	£45,900	SR	21.75
1046945	N2A Ferris Bay Road Ballylumford Larne	£1,150	£1,400	SR	21.74
1037531	CARNFUNNOCK COUNTRY PARK GOLF SHOP AND DRIVING RANGE Coast Road Carnfunnock Ballygalley Larne BT40 2QG	£4,150	£5,050		21.69
757462	EQUESTRIAN AND LEISURE CENTRE ECCLESVILLE CENTRE 11 Ecclesville Road Ecclesville Demesne Fintona Omagh BT78 2EF	£51,700	£62,800	EX	21.47
600483	77 Stream Street Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick BT30 6DF	£12,200	£14,800	SR	21.31
528853	112-120 Glenarm Road Curran and Drumaliss Larne BT40 1DZ	£19,500	£23,650	SR	21.28
986617	56A Mullahead Road Mullahead Tandragee Craigavon BT62 2LA	£2,600	£3,150	SR	21.15
745108	PITCH & PUTT FACILITY 19 Cranfield Road Cranfield Killeel Newry BT34 4LQ	£2,400	£2,900		20.83
123963	7 Londonderry Avenue Town Parks Comber Newtownards BT23 5ES	£9,520	£11,500	SR	20.8
528720	75 Curran Road	£4,350	£5,250	EX	20.69
890825	244 Glenburn Road Dunmurry Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9BB	£6,380	£7,700	SR	20.69

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998215	29 Highmoor Road Clonmakane Londonderry BT47 3AY	£750	£905	SR	20.67
603348	12 South Promenade Ballaghbeg Newcastle BT33 0EX	£4,440	£5,350	SR	20.5
969117	CHANGING ROOMS LANDHEAD RECREATION GROUNDS N6 Landhead Road Landhead Ballymoney	£3,200	£3,850	EX	20.31
604430	7 Teconnaught Road Seavaghan Downpatrick BT30 8QE	£11,350	£13,650	SR	20.26
1014073	169 Cloughwater Road Kinlea Clough Ballymena BT44 9QH	£7,700	£9,250	EX	20.13
25496	12 Taghnevan Walk Taghnevan Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8PR	£6,260	£7,520	SR	20.13
800486	TRILLICK LEISURE CENTRE 15 Gargadis Road Cavanamara Trillick Omagh BT78 3NX	£57,300	£68,800	EX	20.07
437591	BOWLING GREEN 30 Rosemount Avenue Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 0HN	£1,250	£1,500	EX	20
341934	ENNISKILLEN TENNIS CLUB 23 Cooper Crescent Tonystick Enniskillen BT74 6DQ	£2,800	£3,360	SR	20
1004967	34 Main Street Clogher North Bushmills BT57 8QA	£6,300	£7,550	EX	19.84
72969	53B Downpatrick Street Cross Rathfriland Newry BT34 5DQ	£7,600	£9,100	EX	19.74
449761	48A Coleraine Road Tamnymullan Maghera BT46 5BN	£36,200	£43,300	EX	19.61
387013	130 Drumagarner Road Gortmacrane Kilrea Coleraine BT51 5TN	£14,800	£17,700	SR	19.59
465474	22 Drumenny Road Drumenny Big Bready Strabane BT82 0DU	£8,700	£10,400	SR	19.54
382241	SHOW GROUND & FOOTBALL CLUB Ballycastle Road Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 2DY	£30,200	£36,100		19.54
409104	50 Bridge Street Ballycolman Strabane BT82 9AE	£100,000	£119,500	EX	19.5
846571	BOND'S GLEN CRICKET CLUB 230 Kildoag Road Kildoag Killaloo Londonderry BT47 3TJ	£2,350	£2,800	SR	19.15
37642	17A Dalton Park Corporation Armagh BT60 4AG	£4,450	£5,300	SR	19.1
662154	3 1C Tonagh Park Tonagh Lisburn BT28 1DJ	£3,950	£4,700	SR	18.99
612685	7 Neillsbrook Road Feehogue Randalstown Antrim BT41 3AE	£5,550	£6,600	SR	18.92
504712	WHITEHEAD BOWLING CLUB Islandmagee Road Castletown Whitehead Carrickfergus BT38 9NE	£3,700	£4,400	SR	18.92
983415	321 Foreglen Road Ovil Killaloo Londonderry BT47 4PJ	£35,100	£41,700	SR	18.8

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997906	60 Church Road Clondermot Altnagelvin Londonderry BT47 3QQ	£1,600	£1,900	SR	18.75
48750	6A Main Street Rich Hill or Legacorry Richhill Armagh BT61 9PW	£400	£475		18.75
337309	73 Killee Road Killee Coa Ballinamallard Enniskillen BT94 2FS	£2,150	£2,550	SR	18.6
19212	57 Derrymacash Road Derrymacash Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6NL	£13,250	£15,700	SR	18.49
947912	66 Ballynoe Road Grangicam Downpatrick BT30 8AJ	£13,000	£15,400	EX	18.46
754311	ST. MARYS G.A.A. CLUB 90 Ervey Road Tamnaherin Cross Londonderry BT47 3AU	£17,400	£20,600	CASC	18.39
502004	32 Bay Road Cushendun Cushendun Ballymena BT44 0PS	£7,350	£8,700	SR	18.37
177203	15 Oldpark Terrace Old Park Belfast BT14 6NP	£4,900	£5,800	EX	18.37
737416	26 Lower Strabane Road Churchtown Castlederg BT81 7AZ	£3,550	£4,200	EX	18.31
372664	FERMANAGH LAKELAND FORUM 11 Shore Road Enniskillen Enniskillen BT74 7EF	£240,500	£284,500	EX	18.3
393115	5A Bushmills Road Port Rush Portrush BT56 8JG	£8,750	£10,350	SR	18.29
297832	1 South Link Ballydownfine Andersonstown Belfast BT11 8GX	£2,200	£2,600	CASC	18.18
190350	249 Donegall Avenue Malone Lower Belfast BT12 6LW	£495,000	£585,000		18.18
748680	156A Drumaness Road Cumber Drumaness Ballynahinch BT24 8RL	£9,350	£11,050	SR	18.18
406322	410 Victoria Road Leckpatrick Ballymagorry Strabane BT82 0AS	£6,900	£8,150	SR	18.12
588149	KING GEORGE 5TH PLAYING GROUNDS Linenhall Street Ballyvally Banbridge BT32 3EG	£18,800	£22,200	EX	18.09
2395	ANNAGH UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB Tandragee Road Annagh Portadown Craigavon BT62 3BP	£8,650	£10,200	SR	17.92
498841	2 Cushendall Road Bonamargy Ballycastle BT54 6QP	£41,300	£48,700	SR	17.92
983168	ST AIDAN'S G.A.C 532 Seacoast Road Aughill Magilligan Limavady BT49 0LW	£11,200	£13,200	SR	17.86
75793	EAST COAST ADVENTURE CENTRE 7 Seaview Ringmackilroy Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3NJ	£760	£895		17.76
451750	16 Maghera Road Tobermore Tobermore Magherafelt BT45 5QB	£12,150	£14,300	SR	17.7
96994	BOYS BRIGADE RECREATION CENTRE 108 Belvoir Drive Ballynavally Belfast BT8 7QX	£33,400	£39,300	EX	17.66

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
567615	N5 Ballybrakes Road Ballybrakes Ballymoney	£1,700	£2,000	SR	17.65
630641	LITTON HEATING STORES 13 Hillsborough Old Road Largymore Lisburn BT27 5EW	£1,700	£2,000	SR	17.65
348986	2 Monaghan Road Rosslea Rosslea Enniskillen BT92 7AF	£12,800	£15,050	CASC	17.58
390093	55 Lodge Road Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 1NA	£4,850	£5,700	SR	17.53
627053	CLUB HOUSE 44 Bresagh Road Bresagh Lisburn BT27 6TU	£1,150	£1,350	SR	17.39
591761	CLUB HOUSE 163 Scarva Road Ballyvarley Banbridge BT32 3QL	£6,560	£7,700	SR	17.38
92434	121 Belfast Road Milecross Newtownards BT23 4TS	£4,900	£5,750		17.35
438769	TEMPLEMORE SPORTS COMPLEX 41 Buncrana Road Ballymagroarty Londonderry BT48 8LA	£214,500	£251,500	EX	17.25
379309	2 Freehall Road Freehall Watson Castlerock Coleraine BT51 4TR	£21,500	£25,200	EX	17.21
635409	218A Ballynahinch Road Ballycrune Hillsborough BT26 6BH	£670	£785	SR	17.16
868073	N7 Rann Road Annacloy Downpatrick	£6,700	£7,850	SR	17.16
1002876	MARIUS MCHUGH MEMORIAL PARK Killeter Road Castlesessagh Castlederg	£11,100	£13,000	SR	17.12
1006076	CLUB ROOMS 100 Glenkeen Avenue West Division Greenisland Carrickfergus BT38 8ST	£11,700	£13,700	EX	17.09
429626	1A Cottage Row Muff Eglinton Londonderry BT47 3PJ	£7,050	£8,250	SR	17.02
705963	85B Castlereagh Road Ballymacarret Belfast BT5 5FE	£1,180	£1,380	CASC	16.95
78416	30 Kilmorey Street Ballynacraig Newry BT34 2DE	£3,040	£3,555	SR	16.94
759133	8B Milltown Road Tullymore Otra Milltown Dungannon BT71 7LZ	£3,250	£3,800	CASC	16.92
638732	CATCH MY PAL HALL 191B Kingsway Dunmurry Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9SB	£3,250	£3,800	SR	16.92
990200	98A Dromore Road Edenballycoggill Waringstown Craigavon BT66 7QX	£4,150	£4,850	SR	16.87
600106	114 Market Street Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick BT30 6LZ	£130,500	£152,500	EX	16.86
612687	11 Neillsbrook Road Feehogue Randalstown Antrim BT41 3AE	£6,300	£7,350	SR	16.67
745761	102 Irish Street Altnagelvin Londonderry BT47 2ND	£4,500	£5,250	EX	16.67
1003555	PAVILION 34 Dromore Road Dromore Desertmartin Magherafelt BT45 5JZ	£5,400	£6,300	SR	16.67

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917424	42 Comber Road Glasdrumman Saintfield Ballynahinch BT24 7BB	£3,900	£4,550	EX	16.67
589886	54A Dunbarton Street Loughans Gilford Craigavon BT63 6HJ	£8,450	£9,850	SR	16.57
646139	35 Moira Road Hillsborough Hillsborough BT26 6DU	£6,950	£8,100	CASC	16.55
567931	33 Garryduff Road Town Parks Ballymoney BT53 7DB	£216,000	£251,500	EX	16.44
889785	PLAYING FIELDS N47 Drumnabey Road Spamount Spamount	£3,350	£3,900	EX	16.42
729478	RACE TRACK N11 Dundrod Road Aughnamullan Nutts Corner Crumlin	£19,500	£22,700		16.41
794120	177A Shore Road Drummenagh Ballyronan Magherafelt BT45 6LS	£2,750	£3,200		16.36
970463	BOAT CLUB KINNEGO MARINA 37 Annaloist Road Annaloist Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6NJ	£2,450	£2,850	SR	16.33
1001671	28A North Circular Road Tannaghmore North Lurgan Craigavon BT67 9EB	£19,100	£22,200	EX	16.23
835210	VAUGHAN HOLM SPORTS COMPLEX 1B Douglas Road Croshballinree Newtownstewart Omagh BT78 4NE	£6,210	£7,215	SR	16.18
711729	100 Newry Road Lurgancahone Rathfriland Newry BT34 5AP	£19,200	£22,300	CASC	16.15
362941	HEALY PARK (GAELIC FOOTBALL GROUND) 43 Gortin Road Lisanelly Lisanelly Omagh BT79 7HN	£88,600	£102,900	SR	16.14
247625	ORANGEFIELD PAVILION AND PLAYING FIELDS N79 Grand Parade Multyhogy Belfast	£54,100	£62,800	EX	16.08
255231	BOATHOUSE D N10 Lockview Road Malone Lower Belfast	£12,750	£14,800	SR	16.08
830618	LOUGH VIEW SPORTS CENTRE Black Lane Mullaghanagh Mullaghanagh Dungannon BT71 7AY	£29,900	£34,700	EX	16.05
517615	22 Middle Road Middle Division (Main Portion) Carrickfergus BT38 9DN	£7,500	£8,700	SR	16
58270	WARRENPOINT GOLF CLUB 143 Lower Dromore Road Dromore Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3LN	£53,300	£61,800	SR	15.95
408585	DUNAMANAGH CRICKET CLUB 256 Duncastle Road Dunnamanagh Dunnamanagh Strabane BT82 0LR	£3,800	£4,400	SR	15.79
393118	5B Bushmills Road Port Rush Portrush BT56 8JG	£5,700	£6,600	SR	15.79
774636	14 Old Road Moneylane Dundrum Newcastle BT33 0NH	£2,850	£3,300	EX	15.79
673370	CASTLE CANOE CENTRE Castle Island Windmill Hill Enniskillen BT74 5GH	£9,850	£11,400		15.74

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528069	LARNE FOOTBALL CLUB 7A Inver Road Inver Larne BT40 3BW	£15,950	£18,450	SR	15.67
460298	27 Campion Court Gobnascale Londonderry BT47 2EW	£6,450	£7,450	EX	15.5
330586	51 Rossmore Road Ross More Dungannon BT71 4BJ	£24,600	£28,400	CASC	15.45
437248	BROOKE PARK LEISURE CENTRE Rosemount Avenue Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 0HH	£28,100	£32,400	EX	15.3
328853	21A Killyneill Court Coolhill Dungannon BT71 6BN	£3,950	£4,550	SR	15.19
394068	SPORTS PAVILLION 53A Parker Avenue Ballywillin Portrush BT56 8JZ	£5,950	£6,850	EX	15.13
77770	PAIRC AN ESLER (GAELIC FOOTBALL GROUND) Ballinacraig Way Drumalane (Detached Portion) Greenbank Industrial Estate Newry BT34 2QX	£79,400	£91,300	SR	14.99
8318	14 Mourneview Avenue Tannaghmore South Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8EW	£41,300	£47,400		14.77
337167	FERNEY PARK 70 Enniskillen Road Ferney Ballinamallard Enniskillen BT94 2HG	£16,300	£18,700		14.72
464747	22 Mill Avenue Ballyfatten Sion Mills Strabane BT82 9HE	£5,450	£6,250	SR	14.68
945633	PAIRC BHRID 50 Steelstown Road Shantallow Londonderry BT48 8JA	£16,400	£18,800	CASC	14.63
989034	81 Clanabogan Road Clanabogan Upper Omagh	£19,200	£22,000	CASC	14.58
19738	71 Silverwood Road Ballynamony Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6NA	£15,800	£18,100	SR	14.56
847306	100 Old Course Road Saul Quarter Downpatrick BT30 8BW	£12,050	£13,800	SR	14.52
947604	43 Whiterock Road Ballymurphy Belfast BT12 7PF	£20,700	£23,700	SR	14.49
528617	88 Coastguard Road Curran and Drumaliss Larne BT40 1AU	£9,000	£10,300	SR	14.44
303975	46 Cregganduff Road Freeduff Cullyhanna Newry BT35 0NA	£14,200	£16,250	SR	14.44
64211	CLOUGHOGHE PITCH AND PUTT CLUB Dublin Road Drumalane (Main Portion) Cloghoge Newry BT35 8NE	£2,450	£2,800	SR	14.29
908493	4A Ardtole Road Ardtole Ardglass Downpatrick BT30 7SL	£8,750	£10,000	SR	14.29
983572	101 Agherton Lane Cappagh More Portstewart BT55 7RX	£14,900	£17,000	SR	14.09
822083	91 Old Park Road Drumaness Drumaness Ballynahinch BT24 8SE	£12,800	£14,600	SR	14.06
463627	PLAYING FIELD & CHANGING ROOMS N24 Dergbrough Road Lisnacreaght Plumbridge	£4,650	£5,300	SR	13.98

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1038591	55 Garvagh Road Dungiven Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4LU	£2,150	£2,450	CASC	13.95
95065	70 South Street Corporation South Newtownards BT23 4JU	£12,900	£14,700	SR	13.95
986217	N49A Dinnahorra Road Maghnavery Markethill	£2,150	£2,450		13.95
607430	14A Coniamstown Road Bright Downpatrick BT30 8LU	£27,300	£31,100		13.92
420795	O'NEILL PARK 14 Learmount Road Cumber Park Claudy Londonderry BT47 4AQ	£8,910	£10,150	SR	13.92
404407	51 Longfield Road Longfield Desertmartin Magherafelt BT45 5LS	£11,600	£13,200	CASC	13.79
664544	42 Shimna Road Ballaghbeg Newcastle BT33 0DZ	£6,900	£7,850	EX	13.77
996963	KEVIN LYNCH HURLING CLUB 41 Curragh Road Dungiven Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4SE	£9,850	£11,200	SR	13.71
399043	33 Blackpark Road The Creagh (Etre and Otre) Toomebridge Toome Antrim BT41 3SL	£9,150	£10,400	SR	13.66
380160	BOWLING GREEN 108 Brook Street Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 1QD	£4,400	£5,000	EX	13.64
92053	12A Springvale Road Springvale Ballywalter Newtownards BT22 2PE	£14,300	£16,250	SR	13.64
585808	46A Barban Hill Balleny Dromore BT25 1PR	£9,550	£10,850	SR	13.61
569233	2 Far Circular Road Stangmore (Knox) Dungannon BT71 6LW	£19,900	£22,600		13.57
556132	MAGOWAN PARK 132 Mallusk Road Craigarogan Grange Of Mallusk Newtownabbey BT36 4QN	£5,950	£6,750	SR	13.45
596057	43 Saul Road Saul Downpatrick BT30 6PA	£36,500	£41,400	SR	13.42
444037	665 Feeny Road Drumcovit Feeny Londonderry BT47 4SU	£7,100	£8,050	SR	13.38
76673	HALL GAELIC FOOTBALL GROUND 35 New Road Carnally Silverbridge Newry BT35 9NB	£44,200	£50,100	SR	13.35
296416	CASEMENT PARK 88-100 Andersonstown Road Ballydownfine Andersonstown Belfast BT11 9AN	£63,300	£71,600	SR	13.11
512902	CARRICK RANGERS FOOTBALL CLUB Taylors Avenue North East Division Carrickfergus BT38 7HF	£8,400	£9,500	SR	13.1
642049	71 Llewellyn Avenue Lisnagarvy Lisburn BT27 4AG	£10,350	£11,700	SR	13.04
406161	84A Moorlough Road Brownhill Artigarvan Strabane BT82 0ER	£3,940	£4,450	SR	12.94
854818	1D Main Street Killen Near Killen Castlederg BT81 7SE	£3,100	£3,500	SR	12.9

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442224	1A Chapel Road Dungiven Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4RS	£38,000	£42,900	EX	12.89
90963	240 Abbey Road Ballyrawer Millisle Newtownards BT22 2JG	£5,670	£6,400	SR	12.87
35444	29 Quaymount Blackwatertown or Lisbofin Blackwatertown Dungannon BT71 7HW	£19,150	£21,600	CASC	12.79
779719	N36 Burnview Terrace Ballyvally Banbridge	£5,100	£5,750	EX	12.75
728183	49B Gargadis Road Carran Trillick Omagh BT78 3NX	£7,500	£8,450	SR	12.67
511634	63 Upper Road West Division Greenisland Carrickfergus BT38 8RH	£13,450	£15,150	SR	12.64
15533	32A Festival Road Levaghery Portadown Craigavon BT63 5HE	£9,500	£10,700	EX	12.63
439999	42 Drumsurn Road Drummond Limavady BT49 0PD	£12,300	£13,850	SR	12.6
608230	KILLYLEAGH FOOTBALL CLUB 40 Comber Road Corporation Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9QZ	£7,550	£8,500	SR	12.58
377493	WARREN RECREATION GROUND N90 Old Coach Road Mullaghacall North Portstewart	£18,300	£20,600	EX	12.57
581622	PAVILLION AND PLAYING FIELD 2 Laws Lane Ballyvally Banbridge BT32 4BQ	£6,000	£6,750	SR	12.5
808097	30 Ballyavelin Road Ardgarnan Limavady BT49 0NE	£1,600	£1,800	EX	12.5
975347	20 Shore Street Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee BT21 0DG	£19,300	£21,700	SR	12.44
146993	KIRKISTOWN CASTLE GOLF CLUB 142-144 Main Road Kirkistown Cloghy Newtownards BT22 1JA	£32,200	£36,200	SR	12.42
286985	ST JOHNS GAA CLUB 97 Whiterock Road Ballymurphy Belfast BT12 7PG	£49,550	£55,700	SR	12.41
695640	17 Peacock Road Glebe Sion Mills Strabane BT82 9NN	£5,250	£5,900		12.38
221798	32 Suffolk Road Englishtown Belfast BT11 9RZ	£31,600	£35,500	SR	12.34
983560	7 Mason Road Coolmagherly Magheramason Londonderry BT47 2RY	£43,900	£49,300	SR	12.3
315895	GAA CLUB 36 Cavanakeeran Road Cavanakeeran Pomeroy Dungannon BT70 2RD	£18,300	£20,550	SR	12.3
623179	ST PATRICK'S PARK (GAELIC SPORTS GROUND) 12 Castlewellan Road Murlough Upper Newcastle BT33 0DB	£21,300	£23,900	SR	12.21
94711	FOOTBALL PAVILLION 59-61 Portaferry Road Commons Newtownards BT23 8SG	£3,700	£4,150	SR	12.16
1038444	NA MAGHA GAA Springfield Road Shantallow Londonderry BT48 8ND	£16,050	£18,000	CASC	12.15

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53622	BALLYHOLLAND GAA CLUB 13 Bettys Hill Road Commons Newry BT34 2LZ	£21,500	£24,100	SR	12.09
14799	CRAIGAVON LEISURE CENTRE 5 Brownlow Road Legaghory Craigavon BT65 5DL	£108,500	£121,500	EX	11.98
620690	DOWNPATRICK BOWLING CLUB 2A Strangford Road Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick BT30 6SL	£1,730	£1,935	SR	11.85
972894	4A Bog Road NEWRY BT35 9TT	£11,400	£12,750	SR	11.84
986160	8C Tarsan Lane Tarsan Portadown Craigavon BT63 5RT	£7,200	£8,050	EX	11.81
415494	ST. JOSEPH'S G.A.C. 30 Glenrandel Road Altaghoney Claudy Londonderry BT47 4JH	£31,500	£35,200	CASC	11.75
169621	137 Templemore Avenue Ballymacarret Belfast BT5 4FQ	£3,850	£4,300	SR	11.69
450820	18 Halfgayne Road Gortinure Maghera BT46 5PB	£25,800	£28,800	CASC	11.63
302719	BELMONT BOWLING CLUB 6A Kincora Avenue Strandtown Belfast BT4 3DW	£17,250	£19,250	SR	11.59
145171	3 Ballyfounder Road Ballynichol Portaferry Newtownards BT22 1RE	£19,850	£22,150	SR	11.59
598655	21 Circular Road Castlewellaan Castlewellaan BT31 9ED	£14,750	£16,450	SR	11.53
368872	103 Lettergreen Road Donagh Donagh Enniskillen BT92 5BG	£15,650	£17,450	SR	11.5
620925	CRICKET GROUND 40 Comber Street Lisdalgan Saintfield Ballynahinch BT24 7AZ	£4,800	£5,350	SR	11.46
612162	43 Castle Road Kilbegs Randalstown Antrim BT41 4NA	£18,400	£20,500		11.41
728900	28C Eskragh Road Eskragh Omagh BT78 1UW	£4,400	£4,900	SR	11.36
115705	28 Ballymaconaghy Road Knockbreckan Belfast BT8 6SB	£22,900	£25,500		11.35
511686	156 Upper Road West Division Greenisland Carrickfergus BT38 8RW	£23,800	£26,500	SR	11.34
402984	60 Quarry Road Gulladuff Knockcloghrim Magherafelt BT45 8NS	£46,750	£52,050	SR	11.34
909479	CLUB HOUSE 10 Lesh Road Lesh Newry BT35 6NF	£12,710	£14,150	SR	11.33
715314	CITY OF DERRY RUGBY CLUB 2 Judges Road Stradreagh More Londonderry BT47 6LN	£25,650	£28,550	SR	11.31
59894	7 Dundalk Road Crossmaglen Crossmaglen Newry BT35 9HL	£32,300	£35,900	SR	11.15
963303	SPORTS GROUND 174 Loughmacrory Road Loughmacrory Loughmacrory Omagh BT79 9LG	£23,400	£26,000	SR	11.11

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350363	ASHWOODS GOLF CENTRE 211 Sligo Road Ashwoods or Woody Mullaghree Enniskillen BT74 5HA	£4,550	£5,050		10.99
251968	DOWNING MEMORIAL PARK 20A Annadale Avenue Galwally Ballynafof Belfast BT7 3JJ	£8,200	£9,100	SR	10.98
797833	7 Meadowbank Road Leckagh Magherafelt BT45 6EQ	£12,400	£13,750	SR	10.89
419518	GLENDERMOTT CRICKET CLUB 19 Limavady Road Clooney Londonderry BT47 6JY	£6,900	£7,650	SR	10.87
519588	CLUB ROOM CLUB HOUSE 8 Upper Cairncastle Road Town Parks Larne	£4,150	£4,600	SR	10.84
562846	PLAYING FIELDS N7C Ardmillan Drive White House Newtownabbey	£12,100	£13,400	EX	10.74
1029201	DREGISH PEARSE ÓG GAC Byturn Road Envagh Newtownstewart Omagh BT78 4HP	£6,050	£6,700	SR	10.74
735494	12 Alder Road Ballynagard Londonderry BT48 8DB	£39,100	£43,300		10.74
986488	UNIT F 111 Old Dundonald Road Ballyhanwood Dundonald Belfast BT16 1XT	£27,100	£30,000		10.7
77772	NEWRY SHOWGROUNDS (FOOTBALL GROUND) 11A Ballinacraig Way Drumalane (Detached Portion) Greenbank Industrial Estate Newry BT34 2QX	£18,700	£20,700	SR	10.7
501446	21 Shore Road Legg Cushendall Ballymena BT44 0NG	£23,500	£26,000	SR	10.64
431796	62B Ardmore Road Ballyshasky Londonderry BT47 3QZ	£5,650	£6,250	CASC	10.62
1065503	49 St Marys Gardens Ballymagarry Belfast BT12 7LG	£18,000	£19,900	SR	10.56
554585	16 Lynda Avenue Jordanstown Newtownabbey BT37 0NX	£21,400	£23,650	SR	10.51
303783	2A Wilgar Street Ballyhackamore Belfast BT4 3BL	£11,500	£12,700		10.43
70762	4 Sandy Brae Ballymageogh Kilkeel Newry BT34 4SS	£17,300	£19,100	SR	10.4
383214	76 The Crescent Spittle Hill Coleraine BT52 2DS	£21,200	£23,400	EX	10.38
783261	EIRE OG GAELIC FOOTBALL CLUB Tullygally East Road Tullygally Craigavon BT65 5EP	£22,650	£25,000	SR	10.38
1038590	PAIRC COLMCILLE Lowrys Lane Cloughglass Londonderry BT48 0LS	£16,400	£18,100	CASC	10.37
660637	52A Rowan Drive Kilmakee Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9QA	£19,400	£21,400	EX	10.31
857787	PLAYING FIELDS AND PAVILION 102A Glenkeen Avenue West Division Greenisland Carrickfergus BT38 8ST	£13,600	£15,000	EX	10.29

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408838	1 264 Lisnaragh Road Aghabrack Dunnamanagh Strabane BT82 0SD	£3,950	£4,350	SR	10.13
374936	5 Letteran Road Tullynure Cookstown BT80 9XW	£13,900	£15,300	SR	10.07
86390	KIRCUBBIN SAILING CLUB Shore Road Nunsquarter Kircubbin Newtownards BT22 2RP	£13,450	£14,800	SR	10.04
54850	BOWLING CLUB HOUSE College Square West Clogharevan Bessbrook Newry BT35 7DG	£1,500	£1,650	EX	10
94814	BILLIARD ROOM REGENT STREET LIBRARY Regent Street Corporation South Newtownards BT23 4AB	£12,000	£13,200	SR	10
529993	68 Middle Road Ballystrudder Islandmagee Larne BT40 3SX	£3,320	£3,650	SR	9.94
600780	88 Downpatrick Road Mullagh Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9TZ	£30,300	£33,300		9.9
662300	MEMORIAL PARK Warren Gardens Old Warren Lisburn BT28 1EA	£5,050	£5,550	EX	9.9
776748	PAVILLION & PLAYING FIELDS 4A Old Coagh Road Cookstown Cookstown BT80 8NJ	£5,050	£5,550	EX	9.9
978389	BLYTHEFIELD PLAYING FIELDS 74A Blythe Street Malone Lower Belfast BT12 5HW	£4,050	£4,450	EX	9.88
308658	11 Ballinderry Bridge Road Coagh Coagh Cookstown BT80 0BR	£7,600	£8,350	SR	9.87
997021	MOTOR CROSS CIRCUIT 7A Rectory Road Tullyroan Tobermore Magherafelt BT45 5QP	£2,550	£2,800		9.8
327331	22 Gortgonis Road Gortgonis Coalisland Dungannon BT71 4QG	£16,400	£18,000	EX	9.76
374306	180 Killadeas Road Gublusk Ballinamallard Enniskillen BT94 2LW	£15,450	£16,950	SR	9.71
390149	111 Lodge Road Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 1NF	£24,800	£27,200	SR	9.68
1001169	N12A Tirelughan Road Tirelughan Aghnacloy	£1,550	£1,700	SR	9.68
990054	KELLS RIFLE & PISTOL CLUB 80 Fernisky Road Fernisky Kells Ballymena BT42 3NW	£830	£910	SR	9.64
47403	19 Ballyreagh Road Ballyreagh Poyntzpass Newry BT35 6RQ	£3,650	£4,000		9.59
36137	7 Newry Road Corporation Armagh BT60 1EN	£50,100	£54,900	SR	9.58
383817	50 Bushfoot Road Bushfoot or Lissanduff Portballintrae Bushmills BT57 8RR	£19,350	£21,200	SR	9.56
1023016	PLAYING FIELD N32 Camus Park Camus Douglas Bridge	£2,100	£2,300	EX	9.52
39221	37 Ballygasey Road Ballygasey Loughgall Armagh BT61 8HY	£10,600	£11,600	SR	9.43

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937610	STRABANE CRICKET CLUB 25A Park Road Town Parks Strabane BT82 8LJ	£13,990	£15,300	SR	9.36
490241	BALLYMENA BOWLING CLUB Old Ballymoney Road Ballyloughan Ballymena BT43 6LX	£13,350	£14,600	SR	9.36
1003099	20 Buskill Road Moneymore Newry BT34 1SD	£8,550	£9,350	SR	9.36
121740	15 Ballygraffan Road Ballygraffan Comber Newtownards BT23 5NB	£5,900	£6,450	SR	9.32
646245	18 Park Street Hillsborough Hillsborough BT26 6AL	£4,900	£5,350	SR	9.18
318073	111 Ballyneill Road Ballymulligan The Loup Moneymore Magherafelt BT45 7TE	£9,850	£10,750	SR	9.14
419540	41D Limavady Road Clooney Londonderry BT47 6LP	£9,900	£10,800	SR	9.09
104735	DUNGOYNE COMMUNITY CENTRE Brooklands Road Carrowreagh Dundonald Newtownards BT23 4TL	£4,950	£5,400	EX	9.09
66297	DRIVING RANGE N11 Forkhill Road Carrivemaclone Cloghoge Newry	£3,300	£3,600		9.09
608287	KILLYLEAGH YACHT CLUB 22A Cuan Beach Corporation Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9QU	£6,050	£6,600	SR	9.09
779970	PLAYING FIELDS N80A Main Street Scarva Scarva	£2,200	£2,400	EX	9.09
70467	23A Killowen Road Ballinran Rostrevor Newry BT34 3AF	£66,500	£72,500		9.02
618800	4 Taylorstown Road Killyfast Toomebridge Antrim BT41 3PU	£7,800	£8,500	EX	8.97
400608	15 Curran Road Shanemullagh Castledawson Magherafelt BT45 8DG	£46,350	£50,500	SR	8.95
453037	PLAYING FIELD N41A Queens Avenue Town Parks of Magherafelt Magherafelt	£2,800	£3,050	EX	8.93
447898	12 Demesne Place Newtown Limavady Alias Rathbrady Beg Limavady BT49 0HG	£20,850	£22,700	SR	8.87
66261	49 Forkhill Road Ballymacdermot Cloghoge Newry BT35 8QX	£40,650	£44,200	SR	8.73
407162	PLAYING FIELDS N28 Lower Strabane Road Churchtown Castlederg	£3,450	£3,750	EX	8.7
365317	ERRIGAL CIARAN GAC CLUBROOMS 15 Park Road Dunmoyle Sixmilecross Omagh BT79 9EL	£23,000	£25,000	SR	8.7
714613	70 Drumnabreeze Road Drumnabreeze Craigavon BT66 7NT	£84,500	£91,800		8.64
131972	82 Broadway Corporation Bangor BT20 4TS	£13,900	£15,100	SR	8.63
632790	14 Good Shepherd Road Poleglass Dunmurry Belfast BT17 0PP	£23,800	£25,850	SR	8.61

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
984918	5 High Street Derry More Bessbrook Newry BT35 7DY	£11,700	£12,700	EX	8.55
326350	138 Annagher Road Annagher Coalisland Dungannon BT71 4NE	£31,400	£34,050	CASC	8.44
29821	55 Main Street Donaghcloney Donaghcloney Craigavon BT66 7LR	£4,150	£4,500	SR	8.43
567137	42 Bridge Road Dunloy Dunloy Ballymena BT44 9EF	£52,200	£56,600	SR	8.43
346561	1 Killypaddy Road Lisoneill Lisnaskea Enniskillen BT92 0JJ	£87,900	£95,200	EX	8.3
905977	47A Lisnagrot Road Kilrea Kilrea Coleraine BT51 5SF	£11,450	£12,400	SR	8.3
145208	GAELIC SPORTS GROUND 12 Ballygalget Road Ballygalget Portaferry Newtownards BT22 1NF	£13,350	£14,450	SR	8.24
446277	BENONE TOURIST COMPLEX 53 Benone Avenue Benone Limavady BT49 0LQ	£65,600	£71,000	EX	8.23
122851	3 Park Way Town Parks Comber Newtownards BT23 5AR	£7,900	£8,550	SR	8.23
1041987	FOYLE ARENA 4A Limavady Road Clooney Londonderry BT47 6JY	£450,000	£487,000	EX	8.22
1044389	HARRYVILLE COMMUNITY CENTRE 73 Brooke Park Ballykeel Ballymena BT42 3BL	£34,100	£36,900	EX	8.21
1000446	COLLEGELAND G.F.C. College Lands Road Kishaboy Charlemont Moy Dungannon BT71 7SE	£7,950	£8,600	SR	8.18
154970	100 Clandeboye Road Ballyvarnet Bangor BT20 3JU	£370	£400	SR	8.11
336017	100 Annaghmore Road Derrytresk Coalisland Dungannon BT71 4QZ	£21,650	£23,400	SR	8.08
972994	KILLYCLOGHER GAA GROUND 36 Drumnakilly Road Ballynamullan Omagh BT79 0JP	£29,150	£31,500	CASC	8.06
373002	CELTIC PARK RECREATION GROUND 36 Dublin Road Breandrum Enniskillen BT74 6HP	£11,200	£12,100	EX	8.04
865108	UNIT 5 ODYSSEY PAVILION 2 Queens Quay Ballymacarret Intake Belfast BT3 9QQ	£582,500	£629,000	EX	7.98
435605	49 Victoria Road Prehen Londonderry BT47 2PU	£40,100	£43,300	SR	7.98
41122	81 Clady Road Clady More Mowhan Armagh BT60 2HA	£5,650	£6,100	SR	7.96
640115	10A Hannahstown Road Ballymacward Upper Lisburn BT28 3TB	£3,800	£4,100		7.89
323654	109 Killyliss Road Roan Dungannon BT70 1LE	£19,050	£20,550	SR	7.87
448008	54 Killane Road Killane Limavady BT49 0DN	£8,900	£9,600	SR	7.87

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618714	1 Shore Road Toome Toome Antrim BT41 3NW	£14,050	£15,150	SR	7.83
371721	BAWNACRE CENTRE 35 Castle Street Burfitts Hill Irvinestown Enniskillen BT94 1EE	£97,000	£104,500	EX	7.73
239841	19 Somerdale Park Ballysillan Lower Belfast BT14 7HD	£9,700	£10,450	SR	7.73
51252	1 ARMAGH CRICKET CLUB 1A The Mall Corporation Armagh BT61 9AJ	£9,750	£10,500	SR	7.69
558473	MOSSELEY RECREATION GROUND 8 Carnmoney Road North Ballyhenry Newtownabbey BT36 5NL	£22,100	£23,800	EX	7.69
512869	CARRICKFERGUS BOWLING CLUB 25 St Brides Street North East Division North East Division Carrickfergus BT38 8AF	£1,300	£1,400	EX	7.69
795494	12B Carnteel Road Glack Aghnacloy BT69 6DU	£3,300	£3,550	EX	7.58
442233	13 Garvagh Road Dungiven Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4LT	£12,600	£13,550	SR	7.54
734270	99A Tullyvar Road Drone Aghnacloy BT69 6BL	£15,300	£16,450	SR	7.52
646201	15 Old Coach Road Hillsborough Hillsborough BT26 6PB	£3,000	£3,225	SR	7.5
247475	3 Gibson Park Avenue Ballymacnaghy Belfast BT6 9GL	£7,350	£7,900	SR	7.48
452058	63 Ballyronan Road Town Parks of Magherafelt Magherafelt BT45 6EW	£5,350	£5,750		7.48
70559	32 Killowen Village Ballinran Rostrevor Newry BT34 3AJ	£4,420	£4,750	SR	7.47
607416	105 Commons Road Commons of Clanmaghera Ballykinler Downpatrick BT30 8DG	£6,050	£6,500	SR	7.44
450734	37 Garvagh Road Swatragh Swatragh Maghera BT46 5QE	£20,900	£22,450	SR	7.42
999203	52 Crossan Road Carrickcrossan Mayobridge Newry BT34 2HY	£6,800	£7,300		7.35
294113	21 Ballygomartin Road Edenderry BELFAST BT13 3LA	£8,850	£9,500	SR	7.34
624244	4 Audleystown Road Castleward Castleward Estate Downpatrick BT30 7LS	£2,050	£2,200	CASC	7.32
847040	FAUGHAN VALLEY GOLF COURSE 8B Carmoney Road Mobuoy Eglinton Londonderry BT47 3JH	£6,900	£7,400		7.25
476406	30 Woodside Road Broughshane Lower Ballymena BT42 4HX	£16,600	£17,800		7.23
399721	30 Ballyscullion Road Drumanee Lower Bellaghy Magherafelt BT45 8LD	£33,550	£35,950	SR	7.15
568333	37A Church Street Glebe Ballymoney BT53 6HS	£3,500	£3,750	SR	7.14

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748516	UNIT 1 BLACKWOOD GOLF CENTRE 150 Crawfordsburn Road Ballyleidy Bangor BT19 1GB	£54,800	£58,700		7.12
803386	11 Lough Road Mullaghbane Mullaghbawn Newry BT35 9XP	£9,900	£10,600		7.07
778431	34 Benburb Road Moy Moy Dungannon BT71 7SQ	£11,450	£12,250	SR	6.99
177539	44 Westland Road Old Park Belfast BT14 6NH	£22,900	£24,500	SR	6.99
779691	PAVILLION & PLAYING FIELDS 20A Leafair Park Shantallow Londonderry BT48 8JS	£8,600	£9,200	EX	6.98
5687	192 Gilford Road Carrick Portadown Craigavon BT63 5LF	£50,300	£53,800	SR	6.96
1001126	SHOOTING RANGE N38A Rotten Mountain Road Lugmore Kesh	£1,450	£1,550	SR	6.9
605815	20 Grove Road Ballymaglave North Ballynahinch BT24 8PN	£58,850	£62,900	SR	6.88
776169	88 Castlewellan Road Moneywabane Dromara Dromore BT25 2JN	£6,650	£7,100	CASC	6.77
384496	GARVAGH FOOTBALL CLUB Kurin Road Ballynameen Garvagh Coleraine BT51 5NL	£9,650	£10,300	EX	6.74
325052	1 Drumreany Road Drumreany Castlecaulfield Dungannon BT70 3NY	£7,550	£8,050	EX	6.62
49758	TANDRAGEE GOLF CLUBHOUSE 13 Markethill Road Derryallen Tandragee Craigavon BT62 2ER	£49,900	£53,200	SR	6.61
6587	SHAMROCK PARK (FOOTBALL GROUND) Fitzgerald Park Clownagh Portadown Craigavon BT62 3QR	£37,200	£39,600		6.45
373951	SPORTS GROUND N61A Carranboy Road Carranboy Lisnarick	£1,550	£1,650	EX	6.45
944558	5A Lylehill Road Templepatrick Templepatrick	£3,950	£4,200	EX	6.33
70710	KILKEEL GOLF COURSE (CLUB HOUSE) 210 Newry Road Ballyrogan or Mourne Park Mourne Park Kilkeel Newry BT34 4LB	£52,400	£55,700	SR	6.3
512610	35 North Road North East Division Carrickfergus BT38 8LP	£40,000	£42,500	SR	6.25
582991	32 Scarva Road Edenderry Banbridge BT32 3AS	£6,830	£7,250	SR	6.15
606029	6 Mountview Road Ballymacarn North Ballynahinch BT24 8JR	£13,050	£13,850	SR	6.13
745682	231A Derryboy Road Killinchy in the Woods Crossgar Downpatrick BT30 9DL	£4,900	£5,200		6.12
627221	112 Comber Road Ballyhomra Hillsborough BT26 6NA	£4,100	£4,350		6.1
454984	PLAYING FIELD N17 Macknagh Road Tirgarvil Upperlands Maghera	£990	£1,050	EX	6.06

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675839	50 Park Road Ballynafof Belfast BT7 2FX	£20,750	£22,000	SR	6.02
352427	OMAGH LAWN TENNIS CLUB Crevenagh Road Campsie Omagh BT79 0EQ	£6,650	£7,050	SR	6.02
63145	25 Hilltown Road Ballydulany Mayobridge Newry BT34 2HJ	£6,650	£7,050	SR	6.02
765286	10 Ballymacnab Road Ballymacanab Tassagh Armagh BT60 2QS	£11,700	£12,400	SR	5.98
301258	3 Clonlee Drive Ballyhackamore Belfast BT4 3DA	£5,900	£6,250	SR	5.93
290608	37 Windsor Avenue Malone Lower Belfast BT9 6EJ	£17,700	£18,750	CASC	5.93
348291	291 Moorlough Road Drumclay Newtownbutler Enniskillen BT92 8BJ	£4,250	£4,500	SR	5.88
771946	20 Aghadavoyle Road Aghadavoyle Jonesborough Newry BT35 8JJ	£21,350	£22,600	SR	5.85
109208	CLUB ROOMS 20A Ballymaconaghy Road Lisnabreeny Belfast BT8 6SB	£8,550	£9,050		5.85
148772	233 Scrabo Road Scrabo Newtownards BT23 4SL	£42,800	£45,300	SR	5.84
507071	CARRICKFERGUS RUGBY CLUB Woodburn Road West Division Carrickfergus BT38 8HQ	£22,600	£23,900	SR	5.75
529679	LARNE GOLF CLUB 54 Ferris Bay Road Ballycronan More Islandmagee Larne BT40 3RT	£17,400	£18,400	SR	5.75
296100	104A Woodvale Road Edenderry Belfast BT13 3BU	£10,450	£11,050	SR	5.74
309878	46 Loughdoo Road Killeenan Pomeroy Dungannon BT70 2SW	£5,250	£5,550	CASC	5.71
342946	40 Glenlevan Road Sandhill Derrygonnelly Enniskillen BT93 6ER	£16,610	£17,550	CASC	5.66
350870	8 Edenmore Lane Edenmore Tempo Enniskillen BT94 3HU	£13,300	£14,050	SR	5.64
902416	RACE PITS N7A Hannahstown Road Ballymacward Upper Lisburn	£4,450	£4,700		5.62
359414	FINTONA GOLF CLUB 1-3 Kiln Street Ecclesville Demesne Fintona Omagh BT78 2BJ	£19,600	£20,700	SR	5.61
419538	41 Limavady Road Clooney Londonderry BT47 6LL	£9,100	£9,600	CASC	5.49
297868	OLIVER PLUNKETT 28-32 South Link Ballydownfine Andersonstown Belfast BT11 8GX	£7,300	£7,700	EX	5.48
552044	385 Doagh Road Ballyduff Newtownabbey BT36 6XD	£20,100	£21,200	EX	5.47
327826	BRACKAVILLE SOCIAL CLUB 119A Brackaville Road Roughan Coalisland Dungannon BT71 4NL	£10,150	£10,700	SR	5.42

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501617	PITCH 208 Garron Road Bay Glenariffe Ballymena	£1,850	£1,950	CASC	5.41
201595	2A Mount Vernon Road Low-Wood Belfast BT15 4AX	£18,500	£19,500		5.41
232020	ARCHWAY YOUTH CLUB Lomond Avenue Ballyhackamore Belfast BT4 3AJ	£14,800	£15,600		5.41
160631	BANGOR PARISH HALL 30 Bingham Street Corporation Bangor BT20 5DW	£5,600	£5,900	SR	5.36
224800	YOUTH CLUB Finaghy Road South Ballyfinaghy Belfast BT10 0BY	£31,800	£33,500		5.35
1068	38A Bridge Street Tavanagh Portadown Craigavon BT62 1JD	£4,700	£4,950	EX	5.32
408754	PLAYING FIELD N49 Lisnaragh Road Stoneyfalls Dunnamanagh	£1,900	£2,000	EX	5.26
590535	11 Iveagh Park Aughnavallog Rathfriland Newry BT34 5NQ	£4,750	£5,000	EX	5.26
106869	PAVILION & BOWLING GREEN TULLYCARNET BOWLING GREEN Kingsland Park Gortgrib Belfast BT5 7FB	£8,600	£9,050	EX	5.23
545281	108 Hightown Road Ballybought Newtownabbey BT36 7AU	£4,800	£5,050	SR	5.21
387726	SPORTS CLUB 32 Creamery Road Articrunaght South Cloyfin Coleraine BT52 2NE	£4,850	£5,100	SR	5.15
594482	4 Castle Place Ardglass Ardglass Downpatrick BT30 7TP	£42,800	£45,000	SR	5.14
1033090	KILLEEN GFC Bog Road Killeen Killeen Newry BT35 8FS	£3,900	£4,100	SR	5.13
548129	25 Springvale Road Rashee Doagh Ballyclare BT39 9JW	£52,900	£55,600	SR	5.1
328969	36 Moy Road Coolhill Dungannon BT71 7DS	£30,850	£32,400	SR	5.02
226127	MUSGRAVE PARK Stockmans Lane Ballygammon Belfast BT9 7JE	£24,000	£25,200	EX	5
1051422	CLUBHOUSE / CHANGING ROOMS 62 Carnanmore Park Dunmurry Belfast BT11 9LY	£3,000	£3,150	SR	5
535985	25 The Square Ballyclare Ballyclare BT39 9BB	£10,100	£10,600	SR	4.95
564534	17 Lough Road Ballyveely Upper Loughguile Ballymena BT44 9JN	£11,150	£11,700	SR	4.93
48982	PUBLIC TOILETS N5 The New Line Rich Hill or Legacorry Richhill	£10,200	£10,700	EX	4.9
583695	GAELIC FOOTBALL GROUND 35 Monteith Road Ardbrin Annaclone Banbridge BT32 5LS	£16,400	£17,200	SR	4.88
1050344	32 Curragh Road Dungiven Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4SE	£70,000	£73,400	EX	4.86

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223742	PAVILION & BOWLING GREEN PAISLEY PARK 95 West Circular Road Ballymagarry Belfast BT13 3QB	£3,100	£3,250	SR	4.84
831485	LOUGHGALL COUNTRY PARK 11 Main Street Loughgall Loughgall Armagh BT61 8HZ	£20,700	£21,700	EX	4.83
165805	210A Seacliff Road Corporation Bangor BT20 5HT	£940	£985	SR	4.79
230870	16 Upper Springfield Road Ballydownfine Belfast BT12 7QX	£18,900	£19,800	SR	4.76
113565	BOWLING GREEN N60 Warren Grove Braniel Belfast	£840	£880	EX	4.76
371312	59 Marbank Road Aghnahoo Florencecourt Enniskillen BT92 1ER	£210	£220	SR	4.76
253765	341 Ravenhill Road Ballynafoy Belfast BT6 0BT	£7,350	£7,700	CASC	4.76
516695	GOLF COURSE BENTRA GOLF COURSE N1 Slaughterford Road Bentra Whitehead	£12,600	£13,200	EX	4.76
997172	157A Clonmore Road Clonmore Dungannon BT71 6HX	£7,400	£7,750	SR	4.73
399507	243A Shore Road Ballymaguigan Ballyronan Magherafelt BT45 6LH	£5,300	£5,550	SR	4.72
504968	WHITEHEAD GOLF CLUB McCraes Brae Castletown Whitehead Carrickfergus BT38 9NZ	£22,450	£23,500	SR	4.68
814419	BALMORAL BOWLING CLUB Belvoir Drive Ballylenaghan Upper Belfast BT8 7DT	£11,800	£12,350	SR	4.66
280762	PARK & PLAYING FIELDS N1 Wedderburn Gardens Ballyfinaghy Belfast	£23,700	£24,800	EX	4.64
985318	UNIT 6 THE TORRENT COMPLEX 9 Hillview Avenue Donaghmore Donaghmore Dungannon BT70 3DL	£12,950	£13,550	CASC	4.63
476050	128 Raceview Road Broughshane Upper Broughshane Ballymena BT42 4HY	£39,500	£41,300	SR	4.56
23606	LURGAN GOLF CLUB 104 Windsor Avenue Demesne Lurgan Craigavon BT67 9BN	£39,500	£41,300	SR	4.56
444685	297 Drumsurn Road Drumsurn Lower Limavady BT49 0PX	£11,100	£11,600	SR	4.5
247623	DIXON PARK PLAYING FIELDS Orby Road Ballyrushboy Belfast BT5 5HP	£15,600	£16,300	EX	4.49
744152	DERG VALLEY LEISURE CENTRE 6 Strabane Road Churchtown Castleberg BT81 7HZ	£58,000	£60,600	EX	4.48
410453	AGHYARAN GAC 7 Park Road Aghyaran Castleberg BT81 7YW	£18,250	£19,050	SR	4.38
411555	38 Golf Course Road Coolaghy Newtownstewart Omagh BT78 4HU	£24,150	£25,200	SR	4.35

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453036	3 Princess Terrace Town Parks of Magherafelt Magherafelt BT45 6DD	£2,300	£2,400	EX	4.35
774504	PLAYING FIELD CHANGING ROOMS School Road Killough Killough Downpatrick BT30 7QL	£2,300	£2,400	EX	4.35
588789	MARQUEE 11 Backaderry Road Leitrim Ballyward Castlewella BT31 9SL	£18,400	£19,200	SR	4.35
504377	6 Castlevew Road Castletown Whitehead Carrickfergus BT38 9NA	£18,500	£19,300	EX	4.32
206674	73 Shandon Park Knock Belfast BT5 6NY	£65,300	£68,100	SR	4.29
456017	OAKLAND PARK 7A Circular Road Ballymagowan Londonderry BT48 9UG	£8,300	£8,650	EX	4.22
987766	25 Bridge Street Tamniaran Castledawson Magherafelt BT45 8EB	£20,540	£21,400	SR	4.19
520241	98 Shore Road Glynn Glynn Larne BT40 3HQ	£12,200	£12,700	SR	4.1
23970	99 North Street Demesne Lurgan Craigavon BT67 9AH	£47,100	£49,000	SR	4.03
232676	PLAYING FIELDS N86 Park Avenue Victoria Park Belfast	£83,300	£86,600	EX	3.96
1040429	16A Oldfort Road Tattreagh Glebe Omagh BT78 1RU	£14,150	£14,700	SR	3.89
636259	CLUB HOUSE Lakeland Road Cluntagh Hillsborough BT26 6PW	£1,300	£1,350	SR	3.85
413101	BOWLING CENTRE 101 Irish Street Altnagelvin Londonderry BT47 2JA	£18,300	£19,000	EX	3.83
1012847	N15 Fountain Lane Coolesker Beragh	£4,000	£4,150	SR	3.75
335776	34 Springfield Lane Mullaghmore Dungannon BT70 1QX	£40,300	£41,800	SR	3.72
548012	PAVILION Mill Road Doagh Doagh Ballyclare BT39 0PQ	£6,850	£7,100	SR	3.65
755308	5D Cloughey Road Ballyphilip Portaferry	£2,750	£2,850	EX	3.64
894538	YOUTH SPORT OMAGH LTD 15 Slieveard Park Killyclogher Omagh BT79 7PA	£64,800	£67,100	EX	3.55
975745	WELLINGTON RECREATION FOOTBALL CLUB 1 Willowbank Road Drumnahoe Larne BT40 2SF	£7,050	£7,300	SR	3.55
366692	CLUB ROOMS 37 Quarry Road Carrickmore Carrickmore Omagh BT79 9JX	£36,800	£38,100	SR	3.53
255232	BOAT HOUSE N10 Lockview Road Malone Lower Belfast	£7,200	£7,450	CASC	3.47
507162	42 Belttoy Road North East Division North East Division Ballycarry Carrickfergus BT38 9BH	£37,500	£38,800	EX	3.47
318746	GUNNING MOORE PARK 60 Fairhill Road Tullagh Cookstown BT80 8AG	£7,250	£7,500	EX	3.45

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453041	GREENVALE LEISURE CENTRE 5 Princess Terrace Town Parks of Magherafelt Magherafelt BT45 6DR	£266,500	£275,500	EX	3.38
71591	4B Old Road Bavan Mayobridge Newry BT34 2HE	£20,750	£21,450	SR	3.37
311934	KILLYMOON GOLF CLUB Killymoon Road Killymoon Demesne Cookstown BT80 8TW	£47,500	£49,100	SR	3.37
475778	BOWLING GREEN 25 Knockan Road Broughshane Upper Broughshane	£610	£630	EX	3.28
52008	BOWLING GREEN 173A Kilkeel Road Moneydorrugh More Annalong Newry BT34 4TN	£3,100	£3,200	EX	3.23
981886	PLAYING FIELDS N19 Somerdale Park Ballysillan Lower Belfast	£15,700	£16,200	EX	3.18
84835	14 Mahee Island Mahee Island Comber Newtownards BT23 6EP	£14,550	£15,000	SR	3.09
799120	PAVILION & PLAYING FIELDS 26B Cahore Road Cahore Draperstown Magherafelt BT45 7LY	£9,900	£10,200	EX	3.03
390642	FOOTBALL PAVILLION 2 Rugby Avenue Lodge Lodge Coleraine BT52 1JL	£33,400	£34,400	EX	2.99
94709	DROME PARK 53 Portaferry Road Commons Newtownards BT23 8SG	£10,100	£10,400	SR	2.97
92020	161 Portaferry Road Ballyewry Newtownards BT22 2AJ	£32,000	£32,950	SR	2.97
91718	N122B Main Street Ballyrawer Carrowdore	£1,700	£1,750	EX	2.94
331991	KILLYMAN ST MARY'S GAELIC FOOTBALL CLUB 109 Drumaspil Road Derrymeen Drumaspil Dungannon BT71 6HZ	£10,200	£10,500	SR	2.94
507072	COUNCIL PLAYING FLDS 12B Woodburn Road West Division Carrickfergus BT38 8HQ	£10,300	£10,600	EX	2.91
113463	CLUB HOUSE 31 Upper Braniel Road Braniel Belfast BT5 7TX	£17,300	£17,800	SR	2.89
772739	70 Kilmacanty Road Ballyhagan Kilmore Armagh BT61 8NN	£13,660	£14,050	CASC	2.86
776135	202 Galgorm Road Galgorm Gracehill Ballymena BT42 1HL	£60,500	£62,200		2.81
892306	URNEY GAELIC FOOTBALL CLUB 79 Bells Park Road Stephenstown Clady Strabane BT82 9QY	£8,900	£9,150	SR	2.81
939316	18 Whitepark Road Gortamaddy or White Hall Ballycastle BT54 6HA	£19,700	£20,250	CASC	2.79
655589	35 Bog Road Maze Lurganure Lisburn BT27 5RN	£16,450	£16,900	SR	2.74
759353	109 Loughinisland Road Rossconor Downpatrick BT30 8QZ	£1,850	£1,900	EX	2.7

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
742365	GLASDROMAIN GAELIC FOOTBALL CLUB Quarter Road Mullartown Annalong Newry BT34 4QZ	£6,350	£6,520	SR	2.68
20982	12A Ballymacbredan Road Ballymacbredan Magheralin Craigavon BT67 0QU	£6,350	£6,520	SR	2.68
650643	2 Bells Lane Lambeg North Lisburn BT27 4QH	£7,500	£7,700	EX	2.67
594712	27 Green Road Ardglass Ardglass Downpatrick BT30 7UA	£3,750	£3,850	EX	2.67
619363	36 Golf Links Road Murlough Upper Newcastle BT33 0AN	£102,000	£104,700	SR	2.65
1017582	3A Longfield Lane Longfield Desertmartin Magherafelt BT45 5NW	£1,950	£2,000	CASC	2.56
806057	RATHFRILAND COMMUNITY CENTRE 21 John Street Kiltarriff Rathfriland Newry BT34 5QH	£31,400	£32,200	EX	2.55
241827	518 Lisburn Road Malone Upper Malone Lower Belfast BT9 6GX	£51,100	£52,400	SR	2.54
539422	23A Sawmill Road Ballyeaston Ballyclare BT39 9TA	£3,950	£4,050	SR	2.53
160696	13A Central Avenue Corporation Bangor BT20 3AF	£2,050	£2,100	SR	2.44
596779	PLAYING FIELDS N6 Hawthorn Way Ballynahinch Ballynahinch	£8,400	£8,600	EX	2.38
221567	98A Shaws Road Ballymoney Belfast BT11 9QR	£29,600	£30,300	SR	2.36
522441	192 Coast Road Ballygalley Ballygalley Larne BT40 2QG	£47,000	£48,100	SR	2.34
80454	32 Barr Hill Ballylough Newry BT34 1SY	£8,550	£8,750	SR	2.34
512905	4 Taylors Avenue North East Division Carrickfergus BT38 7HF	£8,750	£8,950	SR	2.29
455178	PARK AND PLAYING FIELD N1 Ballymacombs Road Glenone Bellaghy	£2,250	£2,300	EX	2.22
330552	98-100 Oaks Road Drumcoo Dungannon BT71 4AS	£27,800	£28,400	EX	2.16
45319	MARKETHILL PLAYING FIELDS 30D Seaboughan Road Coolmillish Markethill Armagh BT60 1SD	£7,050	£7,200	EX	2.13
354921	83A Dublin Road Dergmoney Lower Omagh BT78 1HQ	£30,750	£31,400	SR	2.11
969330	39 Roxborough Road Dorsy (Mullaghglass) Newry BT35 0QJ	£7,100	£7,250	CASC	2.11
165800	BALLYHOLME YACHT CLUB 13 Seacliff Road Corporation Bangor BT20 5HT	£58,300	£59,500	SR	2.06
744942	15C Ardminnan Road Ballyspurge Portaferry Newtownards BT22 1QJ	£9,750	£9,950		2.05
510268	41 Ellis Street Middle Division (Main Portion) Carrickfergus BT38 8AY	£2,450	£2,500	SR	2.04

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
56433	7 Pats Road Ballykeel Ballymartin Newry BT34 4NX	£7,600	£7,750	CASC	1.97
395591	PORTSTEWART GOLF LINK 117 Strand Road East Crossreagh East Crossreagh Portstewart BT55 7PG	£143,100	£145,900	SR	1.96
420382	59 Cumber Road Cumber Claudy Londonderry BT47 4JA	£10,600	£10,800	SR	1.89
1034686	25 Tullyodonnell Road Tullyodonnell Dungannon BT70 3JE	£10,600	£10,800	SR	1.89
153241	CARNALEA GOLF CLUB Station Road Carnalea Bangor BT19 1EZ	£42,900	£43,700	SR	1.86
803575	61 Meadow Lane Tavanagh Portadown Craigavon BT62 3NH	£16,100	£16,400	CASC	1.86
998642	28A Dublin Road Burrenreagh Castlewella BT31 9AQ	£540	£550	SR	1.85
559225	1A The Glade Ballyhenry Newtownabbey BT36 5NN	£19,250	£19,600	SR	1.82
318673	7 Convent Road Sullenboy Cookstown BT80 8QA	£11,400	£11,600	SR	1.75
831256	2 Ballywillwill Road Ballywillwill Castlewella BT31 9NR	£34,500	£35,100	CASC	1.74
817783	471 Foreglen Road Owenbeg Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4PW	£110,200	£112,100	SR	1.72
95369	PAVILION Comber Road Church Quarter Dundonald Belfast BT16 2AG	£8,750	£8,900	EX	1.71
998049	24 Moy Road Selshion Portadown Craigavon BT62 1QN	£2,950	£3,000	CASC	1.69
612062	57 Barnish Road Maghereagh Randalstown Antrim BT41 2EJ	£50,450	£51,300	CASC	1.68
257988	SHORT BROTHERS RECREATION CLUB 366A Holywood Road Ballymisert Belfast BT4 1SJ	£47,500	£48,300	SR	1.68
352907	PLAYING FIELD PAVILION N17 Retreat Close Mullaghmore Omagh	£8,950	£9,100	EX	1.68
468959	75 Castledawson Road Polepatrick Magherafelt BT45 6PB	£15,050	£15,300	SR	1.66
978770	PLAYING FIELD N53 Cloyne Crescent Monkstown Newtownabbey	£6,100	£6,200	EX	1.64
379134	CLUBHOUSE CASTLEROCK GOLF CLUB N67 Circular Road Bogtown Castlerock	£74,300	£75,500	SR	1.62
978772	154 Glenshesk Road Cromaghs Armoy Ballymoney BT53 8RL	£9,500	£9,650	CASC	1.58
707880	88A Downpatrick Road Mullagh Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9TZ	£25,400	£25,800	EX	1.57
330752	153 Ballagh Road Ballyvaddan Fivemiletown BT75 0QP	£6,350	£6,450	EX	1.57
42155	20 Esker Park Killylea Killylea Armagh BT60 4LT	£3,200	£3,250	EX	1.56

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28992	TULLYGALLY SHOPPING CENTRE 11 Tullygally Shopping Centre Tullygally Tullygally CRAIGAVON BT65 5AU	£640	£650	EX	1.56
533707	BALLYCLARE PLAYING FIELDS Foundry Lane Ballyclare Ballyclare BT39 9BQ	£3,200	£3,250	EX	1.56
998100	SHOWGROUNDS 4A North Road Town Parks Ballymoney BT53 6BW	£6,550	£6,650		1.53
394172	PAVILLION RECREATION GROUNDS 14 Ramore Avenue Port Rush Portrush BT56 8BB	£13,100	£13,300	EX	1.53
278636	89 Dunmurry Lane Old Forge Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9JS	£46,000	£46,700	SR	1.52
774501	34A New Meadow Row Ballybannan Castlewellan BT31 9NJ	£3,450	£3,500	EX	1.45
624574	99 Shore Road Cloghy Strangford Downpatrick BT30 7NW	£10,750	£10,900	CASC	1.4
322906	36 Lisnahull Road Lisnahull Dungannon BT70 1UG	£22,450	£22,750	CASC	1.34
304809	4 Sydenham Bypass Strandtown Belfast BT3 9JH	£7,850	£7,950	SR	1.27
866787	1 Belfast Road Holywood Holywood BT18 9EH	£8,150	£8,250	SR	1.23
936009	N12A Knockbracken Drive Knockbreckan Carryduff	£17,000	£17,200	CASC	1.18
980554	28 Chapel Road Ballymacrocket Crumlin BT29 4LY	£8,500	£8,600	SR	1.18
610881	5A Nursery Park Moylinny Muckamore Antrim BT41 1QR	£9,550	£9,650	SR	1.05
390640	RUGBY AVENUE PLAYING FIELDS Rugby Avenue Lodge Lodge Coleraine	£9,550	£9,650	SR	1.05
418792	2 Clooney Park West Clooney Londonderry BT47 6LA	£5,550	£5,600	EX	0.9
341704	ENNISKILLEN GOLF CLUB 60 Castlecoole Road Killynure Enniskillen BT74 6HZ	£33,350	£33,650	SR	0.9
466238	33 Ballycolman Road Ballycolman Strabane BT82 9PH	£29,250	£29,500	SR	0.85
822385	PAVILION & SPORTS GROUND 16A Nursery Road Drumarg or Downs Armagh BT60 4BN	£6,400	£6,450	SR	0.78
377546	CLUBHOUSE OFFICE 27 Portmore Road Mullaghacall North Portstewart BT55 7BE	£11,510	£11,590	SR	0.7
274950	680 Upper Newtownards Road Ballymiscaw Belfast BT16 2QX	£49,100	£49,400	SR	0.61
776233	4 Kiln Lane Kilpike Banbridge BT32 4PD	£17,300	£17,400	EX	0.58
1001525	1A Glenholme Avenue Taghnevan Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8SB	£18,700	£18,800	EX	0.53
656056	68 Eglantine Road Magherageery Lisburn BT27 5RQ	£66,550	£66,900	SR	0.53

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
1004909	FALLS BOWLING & RECREATIONAL PARK Falls Road Ballymurphy Belfast BT12 6EQ	£59,800	£60,100	EX	0.5
338386	HALL 600 Lattone Road Garrison Garrison Enniskillen BT93 4EA	£10,700	£10,750	SR	0.47
134481	CLUB HOUSE 7A Broadway Corporation Bangor BT20 4RH	£51,900	£52,100	SR	0.39
656153	CLUB HOUSE Dunygarton Road Maze Lisburn BT27 5RT	£42,800	£42,900		0.23
200489	8A Downview Avenue Green Castle Belfast BT15 4EZ	£50,300	£50,400	SR	0.2
85282	130 Whiterock Bay Killinakin Killinchy Newtownards BT23 6QA	£32,400	£32,450	SR	0.15
934573	BILLY NEILL FOOTBALL STADIUM Comber Road Ballylisbredan Dundonald Belfast BT16 1XB	£86,300	£86,400	EX	0.12
393436	ROYAL PORTRUSH GOLF CLUB HOUSE Dunluce Road Cloughorr Portrush BT56 8JQ	£149,000	£149,100	SR	0.07
393293	SPORTS GROUND N117 Causeway Street Port Rush Portrush	£1,450	£1,450	SR	0
375793	183 Agivey Road Aghadowey COLERAINE BT51 4AB	£780	£780	SR	0
485779	42 Crosskeys Road Aughterclooney Ahoghill Ballymena BT42 2QU	£15,500	£15,500	CASC	0
448399	6 Roe Mill Road Newtown Limavady Alias Rathbrady Beg Limavady BT49 9DF	£6,250	£6,250	SR	0
334154	5 Ardmore Terrace Moygashel Moygashel DUNGANNON BT71 7RB	£810	£810	EX	0
284637	38A Newington Street Town Parks Belfast BT15 2HQ	£3,400	£3,400	EX	0
84191	60 Ballydorn Road Ballydorn Killinchy Newtownards BT23 6QB	£770	£770	SR	0
57680	105 Burren Road Ringmackilroy Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3SA	£1,300	£1,300	EX	0
24702	CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL PLAYING FIELDS Brownlow Road Legaghory Craigavon BT65 5DL	£8,250	£8,250	EX	0
1038586	ARDMORE GAA Ardmore Road Glenkeen Londonderry	£2,650	£2,650	CASC	0
1037737	GOLF COURSE N212 Killadeas Road Rockfield Irvinestown	£3,000	£3,000		0
167344	ST MONINNA PLAYING FIELDS N77 St. Moninna Park Meigh Killeavy Newry	£1,600	£1,600	EX	0
210659	UNIT 2 22-26 Duncrue Road Low-Wood Intake Belfast BT3 9BP	£9,300	£9,300	SR	0
143178	ROYAL NORTH OF IRELAND YACHT CLUB HOUSE 7 Seafront Road Ballycultra Holywood BT18 0BB	£35,800	£35,800	SR	0

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144879	18 HOLE GOLF COURSE CLUB HOUSE Tower Road Conlig Conlig Newtownards BT23 7PN	£5,100	£5,100	SR	0
870109	THE DEVENISH COMPLEX 33-37 Finaghy Road North Ballyfinaghy Belfast BT10 0JB	£65,000	£65,000		0
979823	BALLYMENA RIFE & PISTOL CLUB 85 Ballyconnelly Road Loan Cullybackey Ballymena BT42 1EW	£1,450	£1,450	SR	0
982768	BOATHOUSE 285 Malone Road Malone Upper (Main Portion) Belfast	£4,450	£4,450	EX	0
974257	48B Moira Road Aughnamullan Glenavy	£220	£220	SR	0
974711	73 Upper Braniel Road Gilnahirk Belfast BT5 7TX	£32,600	£32,600	EX	0
974792	32B Old Church Lane Ballynaghten Craigavon BT67 0EY	£2,600	£2,600		0
808903	81 Reclain Road Altaglushan Galbally Dungannon BT70 2PQ	£3,050	£3,050	SR	0
807897	GYMNASIUM & FITNESS STUDIO 4 Saintfield Park Largymore Lisburn BT27 5BG	£14,200	£14,200	SR	0
778411	CLOGHER CRICKET CLUB 19A Ballagh Road Carryclogher Clogher BT76 0TQ	£1,350	£1,350	SR	0
1005494	UNIT 9 45-47 Ravenhill Road Ballymacarret Belfast BT6 8DQ	£7,050	£7,050	EX	0
1008609	130A Woodtown Road Galgorm Parks Ballymena BT42 1BL	£790	£790		0
998247	GUN CLUB 33 Shannaghy Road Shanaghy (Detached Portion) Killeter Castlederg BT81 7HB	£1,250	£1,250	SR	0
994224	ANNAGHMORE TROTTING TRACK N54 Derrycoose Road Derrycorry North Portadown	£3,600	£3,600		0
1036199	57B High Street Towns Parks Antrim BT41 4AY	£5,500	£5,500	SR	0
1027725	65A Ballycolman Estate Ballycolman Ballycolman Strabane BT82 9AH	£22,950	£22,950	SR	0
1013049	23 Castletown Road Bryantang Ballyclare BT39 9PU	£510	£510		0
1013641	89A Kilgad Road Kilgad Kells Ballymena BT42 3HY	£390	£390		0
1013675	TILDARG FISHERY Breckenhill Road Tildarg Doagh Ballyclare BT39 0TB	£1,300	£1,300		0
1016174	53A Brough Road Tamniaran Castledawson Magherafelt BT45 8ER	£12,000	£12,000	CASC	0
656152	50 Gravelhill Road Maze Lisburn BT27 5RW	£57,000	£57,000		0
727104	CLUBROOMS AND PLAYING FIELDS 38 Fergort Road Drummeland Derrynoose Armagh BT60 3DN	£20,150	£20,150	SR	0

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738397	57A Ballyskeagh Road Ballyskeagh Ballyskeagh Lisburn BT27 5TE	£72,300	£72,300		0
744165	UNIT 15C 288 Beersbridge Road Ballyhackamore Belfast BT5 5DX	£2,250	£2,250		0
603983	156 Drumanness Road Cumber Drumanness	£1,650	£1,650	EX	0
612770	14 Castle Road Half Umry Balloo Randalstown Antrim BT41 4NA	£16,300	£16,300	SR	0
602389	SLIPWAY N53A Ringhaddy Road Ringhaddy Killinchy	£1,200	£1,200		0
599485	24 Ballydugan Road Ringreagh Downpatrick BT30 6TE	£30,000	£30,000		0
591145	54 Banbridge Road Knocknagore Gilford Craigavon BT63 6DJ	£3,550	£3,550	SR	0
586486	2D Mount Street Ballyvicknacally Dromore BT25 1AT	£6,950	£6,950	EX	0
548532	N128 Derrycoole Way Dunanney Newtownabbey	£9,450	£9,450	EX	0
529529	GOLF COURSE (PART) N68 Ballystrudder Road Cloghfin Islandmagee Larne	£6,800	£6,800	SR	0
162962	1 Nuns Walk Holywood Holywood BT18 9LE	£51,900	£51,800	SR	-0.19
656059	71A Eglantine Road Magherageery Lisburn BT27 5RQ	£17,450	£17,400	SR	-0.29
405016	GLEN FOOTBALL CLUB 5A Falgortrevy Road Craigadick Maghera BT46 5DG	£14,800	£14,750	CASC	-0.34
311194	5 Kilmascally Road Mullanahoe Dungannon BT71 5BH	£14,550	£14,500	CASC	-0.34
372048	GAELIC GROUNDS 5 Lack Road Forthill Irvinestown Enniskillen BT94 1FY	£11,400	£11,350	SR	-0.44
43259	35 Mullavilly Road Mullavilly Tandragee Craigavon BT62 2LX	£9,100	£9,050	SR	-0.55
110588	55 Church Road Breda Newtownbreda Belfast BT8 7AN	£102,600	£102,000	SR	-0.58
602649	26 Central Promenade Ballaghbeg Newcastle BT33 0EU	£3,775	£3,750	EX	-0.66
905216	DROMARA VILLAGE F.C. Rathfriland Road Crossgar Dromara Dromore BT25 2EB	£7,350	£7,300	SR	-0.68
574647	51 Lough Road Balloo Antrim BT41 4DQ	£54,600	£54,200	SR	-0.73
374051	77 Crevinish Road Rosscolban Kesh Enniskillen BT93 1RF	£6,050	£6,000	SR	-0.83
10497	1 8A Francis Street Shankill Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6DN	£17,900	£17,750	SR	-0.84
913447	SPORTS GROUND 2 Main Street Dundrum Dundrum Newcastle BT33 0LU	£7,150	£7,090	SR	-0.84
765736	39 Sistrakeel Road Sistrakeel Ballykelly Limavady BT49 9JN	£5,480	£5,425	SR	-1
376843	2 Glen Road Ballyreagh Portrush BT56 8LX	£9,600	£9,500	EX	-1.04

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701365	31 Omagh Road Drumnaforbe Drumquin Omagh BT78 4QY	£14,350	£14,200	CASC	-1.05
654416	N1 Belfast Road Lisnagarvy Lisburn	£42,800	£42,300	EX	-1.17
763747	11 Hall Rampart Derrytrasna Craigavon BT66 6QN	£4,200	£4,150	SR	-1.19
856194	460 Belfast Road Cavanaleck Brookeborough Fivemiletown BT75 0SE	£4,150	£4,100	SR	-1.2
591384	TULLYLISH GAC 14 Drumnascamph Road Knocknagore Lawrencetown Craigavon BT63 6DU	£16,500	£16,300	CASC	-1.21
1023742	CHANGING FACILITIES N52 Dunville Street Town Parks Belfast	£8,000	£7,900	EX	-1.25
247478	8 Gibson Park Avenue Ballymaconaghly Belfast BT6 9GL	£22,400	£22,100	SR	-1.34
34901	37 Ballygassoon Road Tullygoonigan Tullygoonigan Armagh BT61 8DS	£7,400	£7,300	SR	-1.35
859047	2A Kiln Lane Kilpike Banbridge BT32 4PD	£3,650	£3,600	SR	-1.37
564540	36 Lough Road Tully North Loughguile Ballymena BT44 9JN	£7,050	£6,950	SR	-1.42
33371	CATHEDRAL ROAD RECREATION CENTRE Cathedral Road Corporation Armagh BT61 7QX	£27,800	£27,400	EX	-1.44
70219	PAVILION, STANDS & FOOTBALL PITCH 10 Dunnaval Road Dunnaval Kilkeel Newry BT34 4JT	£10,350	£10,200	CASC	-1.45
469586	12 Ballycrummy Road Legarhill Armagh BT60 4LB	£20,600	£20,300	CASC	-1.46
160844	101 Clifton Road Corporation Bangor BT20 5HY	£33,500	£33,000	SR	-1.49
304364	PLAYING FIELDS N2A Knockwood Crescent Knock Belfast	£6,650	£6,550	EX	-1.5
916702	10 Creevehill Road Cran Brookeborough Fivemiletown BT75 0SF	£9,850	£9,700	EX	-1.52
437587	TENNIS COURTS 26 Rosemount Avenue Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 0HN	£3,250	£3,200	EX	-1.54
255229	8 Lockview Road Malone Lower Belfast BT9 5FH	£19,000	£18,700	EX	-1.58
223741	PLAYING FIELDS PAISLEY PARK N93 West Circular Road Ballymagarry Belfast	£18,300	£18,000	EX	-1.64
528538	42A Chaine Memorial Road Curran and Drumliss Larne BT40 1AD	£9,150	£9,000	EX	-1.64
358909	4 Lisnagirr Road Tattraconnaghty Omagh BT78 5NT	£4,220	£4,150	SR	-1.66
1028479	SPAFIELD SPORTS PAVILION 163 High Street Holywood Holywood BT18 9HU	£11,400	£11,200	EX	-1.75
385329	14 Station Road Killyvally Garvagh Coleraine BT51 5LA	£840	£825	SR	-1.79

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476082	209 Raceview Road Broughshane Lower Broughshane Ballymena BT42 4HU	£32,500	£31,900	SR	-1.85
720260	2A Glen Road Heights Ballymoney Andersonstown Belfast BT11 8RB	£20,600	£20,200	SR	-1.94
212776	GROVE PLAYGROUND N120 York Road Skegoneill Belfast	£77,200	£75,700	EX	-1.94
647676	BROOKE ACTIVITY CENTRE 25 Summerhill Road Killeaton Dunmurry Belfast BT17 0RL	£78,900	£77,300	EX	-2.03
486456	SQUASH COURTS Ballee Road West Ballee Ballymena	£4,900	£4,800	EX	-2.04
242202	STRANGFORD PLAYING FIELDS N44 Malone Hill Park Malone Upper Belfast	£28,400	£27,800	EX	-2.11
371357	78 Moher Road Corraheen Kinawley Enniskillen BT92 4FS	£7,880	£7,710	SR	-2.16
615400	100 Seacash Drive Towns Parks Antrim BT41 1BB	£9,150	£8,950	EX	-2.19
774500	PLAYING FIELDS N6 Bann Road Castlewellan Castlewellan	£4,550	£4,450	EX	-2.2
918520	6A Bachelors Walk Edenderry Portadown Craigavon BT63 5BQ	£4,500	£4,400	SR	-2.22
87615	26 Portaferry Road Commons Newtownards BT23 8NN	£88,300	£86,300	EX	-2.27
140305	CLUB HOUSE Tower Road Conlig Conlig Newtownards BT23 7PN	£101,000	£98,600	SR	-2.38
132567	5 N56E Hamilton Road Corporation Bangor	£2,100	£2,050	EX	-2.38
787806	PLAYING FIELD AND PAVILION N164 Tullaghans Road Dunloy Dunloy	£3,950	£3,850	EX	-2.53
1001214	N12 Farburn Road Lisnaharney Omagh	£1,950	£1,900	SR	-2.56
625179	32 Hilltown Road Tollymore Park Newcastle BT33 0PZ	£85,600	£83,400	EX	-2.57
808743	HYDEBANK PLAYING FIELDS 191 Newtownbreda Road Ballydollahgan Belfast BT8 6QB	£34,700	£33,800	EX	-2.59
556364	2 Park Road Ballyvesey Newtownabbey BT36 4QF	£74,600	£72,500	EX	-2.82
982915	N190A Clooney Road Tullyverry Greysteel	£10,400	£10,100	CASC	-2.88
1038584	ARDMORE FC Ardmore Road Glenkeen Londonderry	£1,700	£1,650	SR	-2.94
1018485	230 Radergan Road Garvaghy Garvaghy Omagh Dungannon BT70 2EH	£91,300	£88,600	SR	-2.96
76319	CLUB HOUSE Cranny Road Mullaghbane Mullaghbane Newry BT35 9XR	£18,250	£17,700	SR	-3.01
15251	SPORTS GROUND 287 Bridge Street Edenderry Portadown Craigavon BT63 5AR	£24,500	£23,750	SR	-3.06
566789	63 Kilraughts Road Carnany Lower Ballymoney BT53 7HL	£16,050	£15,550	SR	-3.12

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151426	HOLYWOOD RUGBY FOOTBALL AND CRICKET CLUB 7 Belfast Road Holywood Holywood BT18 9EH	£14,200	£13,750	SR	-3.17
236175	PLAYING FIELD 62 Carnanmore Park Dunmurry Belfast	£31,300	£30,300	EX	-3.19
856939	86 Monaghan Road Baltarran Middletown Armagh BT60 4DR	£9,250	£8,950	SR	-3.24
336776	45 Ardgart Road Mullaghmeen Ballinamallard Enniskillen BT94 2AR	£16,800	£16,250	SR	-3.27
594375	CLUB HOUSE Ballyhosset Road Church Ballee Downpatrick BT30 7EG	£1,500	£1,450	SR	-3.33
981489	119 Manse Road Raffrey Crossgar Downpatrick BT30 9LZ	£7,450	£7,200	CASC	-3.36
150762	70 Victoria Avenue Corporation North Newtownards BT23 7ED	£5,460	£5,275	SR	-3.39
1063621	MIDGELY PARK Boucher Road Malone Lower Belfast BT12 6HR	£14,600	£14,100		-3.42
1003192	SPORTS COMPLEX 20 Lissan Lane Lissan Enniskillen BT74 4PF	£17,100	£16,500	SR	-3.51
748683	SAUL GAC CLUBHOUSE St Patricks Road Ballintogher Downpatrick BT30 7JQ	£7,100	£6,850	SR	-3.52
254268	58 Knightsbridge Park Malone Lower Stranmillis Belfast BT9 5EH	£36,000	£34,700	EX	-3.61
563178	49 Gortgole Road Bracknamuckley Portglenone Ballymena BT44 8AN	£8,250	£7,950	EX	-3.64
280679	240 Upper Malone Road Malone Upper (Main Portion) Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9LB	£116,900	£112,600	SR	-3.68
1047519	60 Blighs Lane Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 9PU	£10,800	£10,400	CASC	-3.7
1026836	4A Kiln Lane Kilpike Banbridge BT32 4PD	£8,000	£7,700	EX	-3.75
78840	BOWLING & TENNIS CLUB PAVILION Warrenpoint Road Ballynacraig Newry BT34 2PF	£9,200	£8,850	EX	-3.8
96995	BOWLING GREEN N108 Belvoir Drive Ballylenaghan Upper Belfast	£500	£480	EX	-4
463644	VAUGHAN HOLM SPORTS COMPLEX N1A Douglas Road Croshballinree Newtown Stewart	£7,500	£7,200	EX	-4
733677	28 Drumalig Road Killinure Carryduff Belfast BT8 8EQ	£53,900	£51,700		-4.08
336079	DERRYLOUGHAN KEVIN BARRYS GFC 90 Ballybeg Road Aughamullan DUNGANNON BT71 5DX	£11,250	£10,790	CASC	-4.09
1044434	7 Aughaward Road Woaghternerry Enniskillen BT74 4BZ	£9,750	£9,350	CASC	-4.1
476423	73 Woodside Road Crebilly Ballymena BT42 4QH	£14,500	£13,900	EX	-4.14

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
620712	PLAYING FIELD N25 Strangford Road Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick	£1,200	£1,150	SR	-4.17
844833	91A Abbey Road Ballymacruise Millisle Newtownards BT22 2DG	£360	£345		-4.17
340740	13 Carrickyheen Road Lismalore Brookeborough Enniskillen BT94 4EZ	£11,800	£11,300	SR	-4.24
776353	370 Holywood Road Ballymaghan Belfast BT4 1SL	£10,600	£10,150	SR	-4.25
538638	10 Cullyburn Road Ballyhowne Newtownabbey BT36 5BN	£1,150	£1,100		-4.35
346884	51 Drumgoon Road Drumgoon Maguiresbridge Enniskillen BT94 4PB	£5,750	£5,500	SR	-4.35
343631	234 Ballyconnell Road Gortineddan Derrylin Enniskillen BT92 9EG	£12,600	£12,050	CASC	-4.37
363386	14B Mountjoy Road Lisnamallard Omagh BT79 7AD	£3,400	£3,250	SR	-4.41
203487	20 North Circular Road Ballyaghagan Belfast BT15 5HB	£17,000	£16,250	SR	-4.41
212413	121 Skegoneill Avenue Skegoneill Belfast BT15 3JR	£6,750	£6,450		-4.44
501766	PAVILION AND PLAYING FIELDS 1A Middlepark Avenue Middle Park Cushendall Ballymena BT44 0TH	£11,200	£10,700	EX	-4.46
499020	4 Mary Street Town Parks Ballycastle BT54 6QH	£8,800	£8,400	EX	-4.55
631074	PAVILION PLAYINGS FIELDS N38 Saintfield Road Largymore Lisburn	£6,600	£6,300	EX	-4.55
817355	30 Drumaquill Road	£1,100	£1,050		-4.55
809970	6 Ballindarragh Road Coolmillish Markethill Armagh BT60 1QB	£6,550	£6,250	CASC	-4.58
432136	51 Glenshane Road Drumahoe Londonderry BT47 3SF	£34,900	£33,300	EX	-4.58
498039	32 Drones Road Moyaver Upper Armoy Ballymoney BT53 8XJ	£860	£820	SR	-4.65
50445	CLUBROOMS PLAYING FIELD 50 Barrack Hill Corporation Armagh BT60 1BJ	£5,900	£5,600	EX	-5.08
142004	HELEN'S BAY GOLF CLUB 16 Golf Road Ballygrot Helen's Bay Bangor BT19 1TL	£33,200	£31,500	SR	-5.12
1001386	CLUBHOUSE 46A Ballinran Road Ballinran Kilkeel Newry BT34 4JA	£3,900	£3,700	SR	-5.13
1015477	COAGH SPORTS CENTRE 16 Ballinderry Bridge Road Coagh Coagh Cookstown BT80 0BR	£13,600	£12,900	EX	-5.15
572271	112 Doagh Road Ballyclare Ballyclare BT39 9EE	£27,400	£25,950	SR	-5.29
778434	21 Monaghan Road Tully Aughnacloy BT69 6HU	£11,300	£10,700	SR	-5.31

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400363	PLAYING FIELDS N68 William Street Tamlaghtduff Bellaghy	£920	£870	EX	-5.43
366088	OMAGH ACAD RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB Mellon Park Drive Conywarren Omagh BT78 5NE	£26,550	£25,100	SR	-5.46
528153	41 Main Road Glynn Glynn Larne BT40 3HF	£22,750	£21,500	SR	-5.49
1035596	16 Anneeter Road Ardean Cookstown BT80 0HZ	£10,000	£9,450	SR	-5.5
999204	N60 Blunnick Road Rossmacawinny Florencecourt Enniskillen	£900	£850	SR	-5.56
451439	9A Desertmartin Road Tobermore Tobermore Magherafelt BT45 5QY	£3,600	£3,400	EX	-5.56
325687	1B Augher Road Clogher Demesne Clogher BT76 0AD	£9,750	£9,200	SR	-5.64
75724	50 Rostrevor Road Moygannon Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3RU	£6,200	£5,850	SR	-5.65
247474	GIBSON PARK PAVILLION Gibson Park Gardens Ballymacanaghy Belfast BT6 9GN	£6,050	£5,700	SR	-5.79
1041604	3G PITCH AND CHANGING ROOMS N156B Cliftonville Road Town Parks Belfast	£25,800	£24,300	EX	-5.81
494524	PAVILION AND PLAYING FIELDS 320C Townhill Road Dreen Rasharkin Ballymena BT44 8RW	£12,000	£11,300	EX	-5.83
304994	MARY PETERS TRACK Old Coach Road Malone Upper (Main Portion) Belfast BT9 5PR	£47,500	£44,700	EX	-5.89
141402	ROYAL BELFAST GOLF CLUB Station Road Craigavad Holywood BT18 0BT	£69,500	£65,400	SR	-5.9
392390	2 Coolnasillagh Road Glenkeen Garvagh Coleraine BT51 5EW	£11,800	£11,100	CASC	-5.93
86023	CLUB HOUSE - GAELIC SPORTS GROUND 11 Mckenna Road Rowreagh Kircubbin Newtownards BT22 1GP	£20,950	£19,700	CASC	-5.97
889721	PLAYING FIELDS N1D Douglas Road Crosballinree Newtownstewart	£670	£630	SR	-5.97
221568	PAVILION AND PLAYING FIELD CLUB HOUSE 98 Shaws Road Ballymoney Belfast	£16,700	£15,700	SR	-5.99
344798	52 Drummeeer Road Drumad Lisbellaw Enniskillen BT94 5DG	£4,100	£3,850	SR	-6.1
775854	57 Silverwood Road Knockramer Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6LE	£9,150	£8,550	CASC	-6.56
274937	THE MAYNARD SINCLAIR PAVILION Stormont Estate Ballymiscaw Belfast BT4 3TA	£96,900	£90,500	SR	-6.6
563388	110 Granemore Road Granemore Tassagh Armagh BT60 2NJ	£20,900	£19,500	SR	-6.7
115228	60 Church Road Castlereagh Castlereagh Belfast BT6 9SA	£35,700	£33,300	EX	-6.72

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267708	73 Castle Street Town Parks Belfast BT1 1GJ	£9,650	£9,000		-6.74
612164	51 Castle Road Kilbegs Randalstown Antrim BT41 4NA	£11,750	£10,950	SR	-6.81
948334	WATER SPORTS CENTRE Strand Road Port Rush Portrush	£11,700	£10,900	EX	-6.84
223743	93 West Circular Road Ballymagarry Belfast BT13 3QB	£1,450	£1,350	SR	-6.9
77090	16 Castlewellan Road Ballymaghera Hilltown Newry BT34 5UY	£13,700	£12,750	SR	-6.93
682004	24 Ballykeel Road Ballykeel Banbridge BT32 3UE	£3,600	£3,350		-6.94
620926	PLAYING FIELDS 40A Comber Street Lisdalgan Saintfield Ballynahinch BT24 7AZ	£2,150	£2,000	EX	-6.98
448996	96 Gortnahey Road Drum Dungiven Londonderry BT47 4PZ	£7,690	£7,150	SR	-7.02
916649	122 Tattygare Road Cavancarragh Lisbellaw Enniskillen BT94 5FB	£7,050	£6,550	CASC	-7.09
366795	SPORTS GROUND N25 Termon Road Aghagogan Carrickmore	£1,400	£1,300	EX	-7.14
81243	2 Belfast Road Carneyhough Newry BT34 1QA	£10,500	£9,750	SR	-7.14
146403	N27 Calhame Park Cloghy Cloghy	£2,100	£1,950	EX	-7.14
1036943	11 Dyan Road Caledon Caledon BT68 4UZ	£2,750	£2,550	EX	-7.27
776238	2 Kiln Lane Kilpike Banbridge BT32 4PD	£16,500	£15,300	SR	-7.27
719777	HOLM PARK 45A Ballynahonemore Road Ballynahone More Armagh BT60 1JD	£13,750	£12,750	SR	-7.27
1044569	109 Ballymena Road Dunsilly Antrim BT41 4NY	£16,400	£15,200	SR	-7.32
154969	CLANDEBOYE PARK - FOOTBALL GROUND 98 Clandeboye Road Corporation Bangor BT20 3JT	£9,500	£8,800	SR	-7.37
1024016	33 Killybearn Road Drummullan Coagh Magherafelt BT45 7YA	£7,350	£6,800	SR	-7.48
186335	PAVILLION 885 Shore Road Green Castle Belfast Newtownabbey BT36 7DH	£9,300	£8,600	EX	-7.53
125469	82A Warren Road Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee BT21 0PD	£39,500	£36,500	SR	-7.59
963756	BISHOPS FIELD SPORTS CENTRE 2B Central Drive Ballymagowan Londonderry BT48 9QH	£22,300	£20,600	EX	-7.62
317891	91A Ballinderry Bridge Road Ardagh Coagh Cookstown BT80 0BU	£9,750	£9,000	CASC	-7.69
53736	66 Carrogs Road Burren Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3PY	£20,500	£18,900	SR	-7.8
120468	123 Milltown Road Ballynavally Belfast BT8 7XP	£48,450	£44,650	SR	-7.84

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88293	PLAYING FIELDS 61 Abbey Road Ballymacrui Millisle Newtownards BT22 2DG	£3,800	£3,500	EX	-7.89
723569	2 Comber Road Edenticullo Hillsborough BT26 6LN	£34,000	£31,300	SR	-7.94
257985	BLANCHFLOWER PL FLDS N358 Holywood Road Ballymisert Belfast	£42,600	£39,200	EX	-7.98
28710	63 Portadown Road Tullygally Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8RS	£4,250	£3,900	SR	-8.24
232230	PAVILION Parkgate Gardens Ballymacarret Belfast BT4 1ES	£10,900	£10,000	EX	-8.26
17080	N95 Lurgan Road Lisnisky Portadown	£39,800	£36,500	EX	-8.29
534224	75-95 Rashee Road Ballyclare Ballyclare BT39 9BG	£1,800	£1,650		-8.33
996823	65B Upper Dromore Road Dromore Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3PN	£15,400	£14,100		-8.44
1031066	45 Blaney Road Tullyvallon Newtownhamilton Newry BT35 0DT	£11,700	£10,700	SR	-8.55
372548	51 Algeo Drive Derrychara Enniskillen BT74 6JL	£7,600	£6,950		-8.55
283440	2 Cavehill Road Skegoneill Belfast BT15 5BG	£3,500	£3,200	EX	-8.57
969529	GOLF DRIVING RANGE 1A Ballywarren Road Ballywarren Downpatrick BT30 7DY	£4,600	£4,200		-8.7
167239	14 The Avenue Burren Warrenpoint Newry BT34 3XJ	£7,400	£6,750		-8.78
1016278	167A Washingbay Road Cloghogg Coalisland Dungannon BT71 5EQ	£5,050	£4,600	SR	-8.91
778405	14 Springhill Road Moneymore Moneymore Magherafelt BT45 7NG	£6,240	£5,680	SR	-8.97
587273	116 Huntly Road Ballykeel Banbridge BT32 3UR	£36,450	£33,150	SR	-9.05
160370	N16 The Meadow Groomspoint Groomspoint	£7,150	£6,500	EX	-9.09
403745	PLAYING FIELD PAVILION 7A Quarry Road Cabragh Knockcloghrim	£1,100	£1,000	EX	-9.09
1030475	CHANGING ROOMS & PLAYING FIELDS N3 Drumgose Road Benburb Benburb	£3,800	£3,450	EX	-9.21
795495	COUNCIL PLAYING FIELDS N14A Main Street Ballygawley Ballygawley	£5,900	£5,350	EX	-9.32
641093	36A Belfast Road Lambeg South Lisburn BT27 4AS	£83,550	£75,750	SR	-9.34
837539	46 Crawfords Lane Gardrum Dromore Omagh BT78 3HZ	£2,600	£2,350	EX	-9.62
31722	GATE LODGE Woodville Street Derry Lurgan Craigavon BT67 9DQ	£15,600	£14,100	EX	-9.62
798199	21A Waterloo Road Taghnabrick Lisburn BT27 5NW	£13,200	£11,920	SR	-9.7

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22904	LURGAN RUGBY FOOTBALL & CRICKET CLUB Pollock Drive Toberhewny Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8JP	£20,200	£18,200	SR	-9.9
870804	UNIT 2 ODYSSEY PAVILION 2 Queens Quay Ballymacarret Intake Belfast BT3 9QQ	£156,000	£140,500		-9.94
34486	235A Keady Road Dunlurg Keady Armagh BT60 3EW	£6,000	£5,400	SR	-10
300442	PLAYING FIELD N232 Oldpark Road Old Park Belfast	£6,500	£5,850	EX	-10
1064054	101 Dublin Road Ballymoney Kilcoo Newry BT34 5HT	£22,950	£20,600	CASC	-10.24
380661	2A Millburn Road Coleraine and Suburbs Coleraine BT52 1QX	£14,600	£13,100	EX	-10.27
1021810	GAA PLAYING FIELD N6 Effernan Road Cavanamara Trillick	£2,900	£2,600	SR	-10.34
1024300	170 Newtownsaville Road Lisnarable Omagh BT78 2RJ	£6,850	£6,140	SR	-10.36
40474	PLAYING FIELDS N9 Glen Road Crossmore Keady	£4,300	£3,850	EX	-10.47
152715	BANGOR LAWN TENNIS CLUB Maxwell Park Corporation Bangor BT20 3SR	£9,710	£8,690	SR	-10.5
776059	SPORTS CLUB 7 Shaughan Road Belleek Belleek Newry BT35 7PF	£4,250	£3,800	CASC	-10.59
443556	9 Greystone Road Enagh Limavady BT49 0ND	£206,000	£184,000	EX	-10.68
115808	PAVILION AND PLAYING FIELDS N10A Beechill Park North Ballylenaghan Upper Belfast	£6,550	£5,850	EX	-10.69
80509	PLAYING FIELDS N6 Carnbane Road Carnbane Newry	£5,500	£4,900		-10.91
447522	39 Scroggy Road Rathbrady More Limavady BT49 0NA	£23,500	£20,900	EX	-11.06
810518	ST. PATRICKS GAA CLUB 6 Chapel Lane Gortin Gortin Omagh BT79 8ND	£10,500	£9,320	CASC	-11.24
727599	CLUBROOMS 20 Coalpit Road Saval Beg Newry BT34 2RQ	£28,400	£25,200	SR	-11.27
189941	97-103 Boucher Road Ballydownfine Belfast BT12 6HR	£31,500	£27,900	EX	-11.43
232224	THE OVAL Parkgate Drive Ballymacarret Belfast BT4 1EW	£36,400	£32,200		-11.54
1021168	PLAYING FIELDS N60 Coast Road Middle Park Cushendall Ballymena	£1,300	£1,150	EX	-11.54
216792	14 Milltown Row Ballymurphy Belfast BT12 6EU	£9,950	£8,800	SR	-11.56
479479	PLAYING FIELDS 37 Pottinger Street Cullybackey Cullybackey Ballymena BT42 1BP	£1,700	£1,500	EX	-11.76

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369371	1 Killycappy Road Drumkeen Ederney Enniskillen BT93 0FQ	£9,350	£8,250	CASC	-11.76
397695	11 Ballycairn Road Waterside Coleraine BT51 3NL	£93,800	£82,700	EX	-11.83
681965	GAELIC SPORTS CLUB Ballybrack Road Altdrumman Sixmilecross Omagh BT79 9LU	£5,000	£4,400	SR	-12
774493	PLAYING FIELDS N9 Shrigley Road Corporation Killyleagh	£2,050	£1,800	EX	-12.2
1023189	85A Cushendall Road Barnish Ballyvoy Ballycastle BT54 6QY	£5,300	£4,650	CASC	-12.26
367060	PLAYING FIELD N14 Gargadis Road Cavanamara Trillick	£6,100	£5,350	SR	-12.3
224736	WOODLANDS PARK PAVILION 49 Finaghy Road North Ballymoney Belfast BT10 0JB	£48,500	£42,500	EX	-12.37
1032735	9B Greystone Road Enagh Limavady BT49 0ND	£9,950	£8,700		-12.56
336617	PAVILLION Mountjoy Road Magheralamfield Coalisland Dungannon BT71 5DY	£4,350	£3,800	SR	-12.64
339745	56 Arney Road Mullymesker Arney Bellanaleck Enniskillen BT92 2AB	£4,650	£4,050	SR	-12.9
1004903	ST CECILIA'S COLLEGE PLAYING FIELDS 3 Fanad Drive Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 9QE	£12,200	£10,600		-13.11
255543	CLUBHOUSE NEWFORGE COUNTRY CLUB 18B Newforge Lane Malone Upper Belfast BT9 5NW	£85,000	£73,800	EX	-13.18
364860	GREENCASTLE COMMUNITY CENTRE 47 Mullydoo Road Sheskinshule Greencastle Omagh BT79 7RX	£4,550	£3,950	SR	-13.19
126809	1A Northfield Road Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee BT21 0BD	£5,300	£4,600	SR	-13.21
258097	99 Inverary Avenue Ballymisert Belfast BT4 1RN	£37,100	£32,100	EX	-13.48
967718	47A Tullywiggan Road Loughry Cookstown BT80 8SG	£89,400	£77,300	EX	-13.53
605228	9 Old Road Moneylane Dundrum Newcastle BT33 0NH	£5,450	£4,700	CASC	-13.76
346277	55 Lisnaskea Road Barnhill Lisnaskea Enniskillen BT92 0HD	£18,250	£15,700	CASC	-13.97
577008	134 Staffordstown Road Creeve Randalstown Antrim BT41 3LH	£26,000	£22,350	SR	-14.04
1035836	10 Scroggy Road Rathbrady More Limavady BT49 0NA	£17,700	£15,200	CASC	-14.12
773093	20A Victoria Road Tamnymore Londonderry BT47 2AB	£19,800	£17,000	EX	-14.14

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74237	24 Greenpark Road Rosstrevor Rostrevor Newry BT34 3EZ	£4,950	£4,250	SR	-14.14
970582	78 Brustin Brae Road Ballytober Larne BT40 2LJ	£7,400	£6,350	CASC	-14.19
19550	42 Kilvergan Road Tannaghmore West Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6LF	£6,950	£5,950	EX	-14.39
780531	ROEMILL ROAD RECREATION GROUND 33 Roe Mill Road Newtown Limavady Alias Rathbrady Beg Limavady BT49 9BE	£18,600	£15,900	EX	-14.52
895317	DOWNSHIRE FOOTBALL CLUB Old Coach Road Hillsborough Hillsborough BT26 6PB	£4,100	£3,500	SR	-14.63
664538	TENNIS PAVILION 57 Bryansford Road Ballaghbeg Newcastle	£8,200	£7,000	EX	-14.63
765437	21 Maghera Road Tobermore Tobermore Magherafelt BT45 5QB	£7,850	£6,700	EX	-14.65
998164	151 Kildoag Road Kildoag Killaloo Londonderry BT47 3TJ	£1,050	£895	SR	-14.76
1002615	CULLOVILLE COMMUNITY CENTRE Corrasmoor Road Cullaville Crossmaglen Newry BT35 9JF	£24,950	£21,200	EX	-15.03
221606	27A Stewartstown Avenue Ballymoney Belfast BT11 9GE	£24,200	£20,550	SR	-15.08
92047	TENNIS COURTS N8 Springvale Road Springvale Ballywalter	£1,650	£1,400	EX	-15.15
228144	59-93 Shore Road Skegoneill Belfast BT15 3PZ	£34,000	£28,800		-15.29
702701	111 Coolkill Road Tullybrick (Hamilton) Tynan Armagh BT60 4TA	£8,500	£7,200	SR	-15.29
29488	186 Clare Road Magherana Waringstown Craigavon BT66 7QG	£11,100	£9,400	SR	-15.32
62303	3 Lowes Lane Carrickbracken Camlough Newry BT35 7JS	£18,250	£15,450	SR	-15.34
1040832	PITCH 36 Magherabeg Road Magherabeg Dromore	£1,300	£1,100	EX	-15.38
348537	141 Dernawilt Road Cortrasna Rosslea Enniskillen BT92 7FU	£8,100	£6,850	SR	-15.43
320186	20 Annaghilla Road Derries Augher BT77 0BP	£14,350	£12,100	SR	-15.68
517669	PLAYING FIELDS N120 North Road Middle Division (Main Portion) Carrickfergus	£30,600	£25,800	EX	-15.69
254272	40 Bladon Park Malone Lower Belfast	£25,300	£21,300	EX	-15.81
486457	2-20 Ballee Road West Ballee Ballymena BT42 2JU	£15,500	£13,000	EX	-16.13
175451	B'SILLAN PLAY. FLDS 71-225 Ballysillan Road Old Park Belfast BT14 7QT	£64,200	£53,800	EX	-16.2
812183	HOLM PARK 41B Ballynahonemore Road Ballynahone More Armagh BT60 1JD	£17,200	£14,400	EX	-16.28

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317829	MILLBANK PARK (FOOTBALL GROUND) 32 Tullyveagh Road Tullyveagh Cookstown BT80 8RX	£2,750	£2,300	SR	-16.36
359852	ST LAURENCE'S PARK (GAA) 21 Tattymoyle Road Tonnaghbane Fintona Omagh BT78 2NR	£20,400	£17,050	SR	-16.42
733946	143A Ballyoran Park Ballynagowan Portadown Craigavon BT62 1JP	£10,950	£9,150	SR	-16.44
1041868	PITCHES 143 Glenravel Road Craigdunloof Cargan	£5,750	£4,800	CASC	-16.52
664450	MAGHERDROLL BOWLING CLUB Church Road Ballynahinch Ballynahinch BT24 8LP	£1,270	£1,060	SR	-16.54
250706	ULIDIA PLAYING FIELDS 284-296 Ormeau Road Ballynafof Ormeau Belfast BT7 2GB	£14,500	£12,100	EX	-16.55
338241	62 Lattone Road Belcoo West Belcoo Enniskillen BT93 5DA	£4,800	£4,000	SR	-16.67
779725	39 Cooneen Road Fivemiletown Fivemiletown BT75 0ND	£4,110	£3,420	SR	-16.79
255236	CLUB HOUSE & TENNIS COURTS N8-10 Lockview Road Malone Lower Belfast	£54,500	£45,300	SR	-16.88
1052164	QE2 PLAYING FIELDS Limetree Avenue Ballymacoss Antrim	£6,500	£5,400	EX	-16.92
122845	1 Park Way Town Parks Comber Newtownards BT23 5AR	£5,900	£4,900	EX	-16.95
393728	WATERWORLD 3 Harbour Road Port Rush Portrush BT56 8DF	£102,500	£84,800	EX	-17.27
226114	MUSGRAVE PK PLY FLDS 6 Stockmans Lane Ballygammon Belfast BT9 7JB	£23,600	£19,500	EX	-17.37
620691	2 Strangford Road Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick BT30 6SL	£6,600	£5,450	SR	-17.42
499068	PLAYING FIELDS N11 Quay Road Town Parks Ballycastle	£10,600	£8,750	EX	-17.45
771993	GOLF DRIVING RANGE N210A Newry Road Ballyrogan or Mourne Park Killeel	£4,000	£3,300		-17.5
1023694	PLAYING FIELDS 38 Strathroy Road Straughroy Omagh	£6,500	£5,350	EX	-17.69
175864	SOLITUDE Cliftonville Street Town Parks Belfast BT14 6LP	£25,700	£21,000		-18.29
57437	165 Tullyah Road Corlat Belleek Armagh BT60 2SN	£5,150	£4,200	SR	-18.45
253766	574-668 Ravenhill Road Ballynafof Belfast BT6 0BZ	£52,900	£43,100	EX	-18.53
27450	122 Maghery Road Maghery Maghery Dungannon BT71 6PA	£6,200	£5,050	SR	-18.55
321972	GAA CLUB Fasglashagh Road Killeeshil Dungannon BT70 3AW	£13,650	£11,100	CASC	-18.68
886314	PLAYING FIELDS N25 St Dillons Avenue Demesne of Down Acre Downpatrick	£2,100	£1,700		-19.05

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
303824	91 Circular Road Ballymisert Belfast BT4 2GD	£65,150	£52,700	EX	-19.11
501557	68 Coast Road Bellisk or Waterford Cushendall Ballymena BT44 0QW	£13,800	£11,150	SR	-19.2
1011059	39 Castlewellan Road Carnacavill Newcastle BT33 0JY	£4,150	£3,350		-19.28
1021561	MULTI USE GAMES AREA N29 Windermere Lodge Ballymacoss Lisburn	£1,550	£1,250	EX	-19.35
159859	N2 Main Street Groomsport Groomsport	£1,000	£805	EX	-19.5
1055177	1 SALLY GARDEN COMMUNITY CENTRE Sally Garden Lane Poleglass Dunmurry Belfast BT17 0UJ	£24,600	£19,800	EX	-19.51
775462	PLAYING FIELDS N4 Moneyhaw Road Moneymore Moneymore	£2,300	£1,850	EX	-19.57
787092	ANNAGHMORE G. F. C. 62 Eglis Road Eglis Portadown Craigavon BT62 1NL	£10,900	£8,750	SR	-19.72
776563	29 Tullynavall Road Tullynavall Cullyhanna Newry BT35 0PZ	£3,450	£2,750	SR	-20.29
31044	CLAN EIREANN FOOTBALL CLUB 55 Lake Street Dougher Lurgan Craigavon BT67 9DT	£20,200	£16,100	EX	-20.3
384576	9 Curraghmore Road Brockaghboy Garvagh Coleraine BT51 5DS	£25,250	£20,100	SR	-20.4
124578	PLAYING FIELDS CROMMELIN PARK SPORTS PAVILLION N1A Moat Street Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee	£10,200	£8,100	EX	-20.59
493304	SHOW GROUNDS 65 Warden Street Town Parks Ballymena BT43 7DT	£80,100	£63,600		-20.6
36287	ARMAGH R F C The Palace Demesne Parkmore or Demesne Mowhan Armagh BT60 4EN	£21,500	£16,950	SR	-21.16
149442	85 Comber Road Corporation South Newtownards BT23 4QS	£16,650	£13,100	SR	-21.32
498037	PLAYING FIELDS 28 Drones Road Moyaver Upper Armoy Ballymoney BT53 8XJ	£7,500	£5,900	EX	-21.33
718897	PLAYING PITCH N33 Ballinacraig Way Cloghoge (Detached Portion) Greenbank Industrial Estate Newry	£5,350	£4,200	EX	-21.5
344279	7 Sheetrim Road Derrylin Derrylin Enniskillen BT92 9JJ	£8,350	£6,550	SR	-21.56
123325	THE GREEN 19 Castle Lane Mount Alexander Comber Newtownards BT23 5EB	£16,000	£12,550	SR	-21.56
282769	PLAYING FIELD N260 Antrim Road Skegoneill Belfast	£2,750	£2,150	EX	-21.82
1071340	CHANGING ROOMS KILFENNAN VALLEY PARK Sperrin Park Kilfinnan Londonderry	£6,800	£5,300	EX	-22.06

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
209220	49 Salisbury Avenue Skegoneill Belfast BT15 5DZ	£8,800	£6,850	SR	-22.16
437588	ROSEMOUNT YOUTH CENTRE 26A Rosemount Avenue Edenballymore Londonderry BT48 0HH	£13,900	£10,800		-22.3
326868	66 Mullaghmoyle Road Mullaghmoyle Stewartstown Dungannon BT71 5PX	£4,550	£3,500	SR	-23.08
929675	ANNAGINNY COUNTRY SPORTS CLUB 22 Annaginny Road Annaginny Dungannon BT71 4DZ	£3,250	£2,500	SR	-23.08
702474	PLAYING FIELDS 65B Upper Dromore Road Dromore Warrenpoint	£6,800	£5,200	EX	-23.53
1032206	(DRIVING RANGE) 211A Sligo Road Ashwoods or Woody Mullaghree Enniskillen BT74 5HA	£1,100	£840		-23.64
945370	9B Mulnagore Road Curlonan Cookstown BT80 9BS	£3,150	£2,400		-23.81
242319	78 Osborne Park Malone Lower Belfast	£41,100	£31,300	EX	-23.84
125104	19 Newtownards Road Ballynoe Donaghadee BT21 0DY	£10,750	£8,150	SR	-24.19
570700	101 Altinure Road Altinure Upper Claudy Londonderry BT47 4DE	£8,850	£6,700	EX	-24.29
339041	PLAYING FIELDS 6 Commons Road Finner Belleek	£3,900	£2,950	SR	-24.36
469302	40A Anne Street Kennedies Milford Armagh BT60 3NX	£5,600	£4,200	EX	-25
795493	PLAYING FIELD N82 Annaginny Road Sessia Dungannon	£1,400	£1,050	EX	-25
133525	117 Bloomfield Road South Balloo Bangor BT19 7HR	£26,450	£19,750	SR	-25.33
332729	TENNIS COURTS N4 Gortmerron Avenue Drumcoo Dungannon	£1,100	£820	EX	-25.45
2552	51 Thomas Street Tavanagh Portadown Craigavon BT62 3AF	£196,500	£146,000	EX	-25.7
155936	PAVILLION AND PLAYING FIELDS 185 Crawfordsburn Road Ballykillare (Main Portion) Bangor BT19 1BT	£7,950	£5,900	CASC	-25.79
664536	DONARD PARK 2 Bryansford Road Ballaghbeg Newcastle BT33 0HJ	£9,200	£6,800	EX	-26.09
447456	THE SHOWGROUNDS 1 Rathmore Road Rathbrady More Limavady BT49 0DF	£17,000	£12,550	SR	-26.18
1030465	DARRAGH PARK Castlegore Road Castlegore Castlederg BT81 7RU	£7,950	£5,850	SR	-26.42
405575	PLAYING FIELDS N5 Art Road Artigarvan Artigarvan	£1,700	£1,250	EX	-26.47
1004758	N81 Concession Road Glasdrummanaghy Cullaville	£4,850	£3,550	SR	-26.8

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
994309	PLAYING FIELD N123A Milltown Road Ballynavally Belfast	£7,800	£5,700	SR	-26.92
1024942	DRIVING RANGE 85B Clanabogan Road Clanabogan Upper Clanabogan Omagh BT78 1SL	£1,000	£730		-27
356505	39 Omagh Road Gardrum Dromore Omagh BT78 3AJ	£23,250	£16,950	SR	-27.1
1042669	PLAYING GROUNDS N38 Orior Park Clogharevan Newry	£1,300	£945	EX	-27.31
319903	42 Lurgylea Road Glenbeg Galbally Dungannon BT70 2NX	£9,990	£7,250	SR	-27.43
154971	102 Clandeboye Road Ballyvarnet Bangor BT20 3JU	£4,150	£3,000	SR	-27.71
331944	TENNIS COURT N13 Derrylileagh Road Derryadd Portadown	£830	£595	EX	-28.31
1024429	DRIVING RANGE 375 Killadeas Road Drumarky Lisnarick Enniskillen BT94 1PN	£1,400	£1,000		-28.57
31912	ST PATRICKS COLLEGE PLAYING FIELDS Desart Lane Lower Corporation Armagh	£6,750	£4,800	EX	-28.89
318734	39-47 Fairhill Road Loy Cookstown BT80 8AG	£3,800	£2,700	EX	-28.95
794459	50A Ballinderry Bridge Road Lanaglug Coagh Cookstown BT80 0BT	£480	£340	SR	-29.17
147242	FOOTBALL PAVILION New Harbour Road Portavogie Portavogie Newtownards BT22 1EE	£3,250	£2,300	EX	-29.23
68486	25 Mourne Esplanade Magheramurphy Kilkeel Newry BT34 4DB	£10,900	£7,700	EX	-29.36
1012309	GAELIC PLAYING FIELD N14B Main Street Ballygawley Ballygawley	£2,550	£1,800	SR	-29.41
1051379	60 Cecil Street Lisdrumgullion Newry BT35 6AU	£1,136,000	£800,000	EX	-29.58
132564	TENNIS COURTS, BOWLING GREENS & PAVILIONS WARD PARK BOWLING PAVILION Park Drive Corporation Bangor BT20 4JX	£44,500	£31,300	EX	-29.66
278618	2D Upper Malone Road Malone Upper (Main Portion) Dunmurry Belfast BT9 5NA	£179,000	£125,450		-29.92
744390	29 Lismore Road Lismore Ballyhornan Ardglass Downpatrick BT30 7SY	£37,200	£26,000		-30.11
86044	TENNIS COURTS N70 Newtownards Road Grey Abbey Newtownards	£1,200	£835	EX	-30.42
363385	CHRISTIAN BROTHERS' PAVILLION Mountjoy Road Lisnamallard Omagh BT79 7AD	£3,550	£2,450	EX	-30.99
669305	PLAYING PITCH N11 Ballinacraig Way Drumalane (Detached Portion) Greenbank Industrial Estate Newry	£2,900	£2,000	EX	-31.03

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
461705	BULL PARK N7-25 Lone Moor Road Edinballymore Londonderry	£4,500	£3,100	EX	-31.11
820331	605A Tullans Park Bellasses Coleraine BT52 2JE	£8,100	£5,550	EX	-31.48
732098	FERRIS PARK 34 Banbridge Road Balleny Dromore BT25 1NE	£15,700	£10,600		-32.48
1042770	MADDEN ROW PLAYING FIELDS N167 Madden Row Crossdened Keady	£3,000	£2,000	EX	-33.33
981423	PLAYING FIELDS WILLOWBANK PLAYING FIELDS 272B Falls Road Ballymurphy Belfast	£4,300	£2,850	EX	-33.72
352428	3 Crevenagh Road Campsie Omagh BT79 0EQ	£16,600	£10,900		-34.34
829218	44A Dromore Road Culmore Omagh BT78 1RB	£15,700	£10,300	EX	-34.39
62841	PLAYING FIELDS PAVILION 20 Coalpit Road Saval Beg Newry BT34 2RQ	£2,450	£1,600	EX	-34.69
19798	7 Turmoyra Lane Turmoyra Lurgan Craigavon BT66 6NG	£53,900	£35,100	EX	-34.88
779731	PLAYING FIELDS 34A Woodlands Ballymacanallen Gilford Craigavon BT63 6JW	£2,150	£1,400	EX	-34.88
1034578	3G PITCHES NEWRY SHOWGROUNDS (FOOTBALL GROUND) 11A Ballinacraig Way Drumalane (Detached Portion) Greenbank Industrial Estate Newry BT34 2QX	£2,700	£1,750		-35.19
1040825	19A Woodend Park Articlave Lower Articlave Coleraine BT51 4UY	£3,550	£2,300	EX	-35.21
611326	MUCKAMORE COMMUNITY CENTRE 4 Ballycraig Road Ballycraig Antrim BT41 1PH	£25,800	£16,600	EX	-35.66
608863	7 Shrigley Road Corporation Killyleagh Downpatrick BT30 9SR	£2,200	£1,400	SR	-36.36
85532	PLAYING FIELDS N9 Church Grove Kircubbin Kircubbin	£3,800	£2,400	EX	-36.84
126808	PLAYING FIELDS N1 Northfield Road Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee	£1,100	£660	EX	-40
327722	SPORTS GROUND N93A Washingbay Road Gortgonis Coalisland	£2,750	£1,650	SR	-40
142521	SEAPARK REC GROUNDS N2 Ballymenoch Park Ballymenagh Hollywood	£16,400	£9,800	EX	-40.24
131961	SPORTS PAVILION 93 Bloomfield Road Corporation Bangor BT20 9SN	£13,900	£8,250	EX	-40.65
585807	PLAYING FIELDS AND CAR PARK N46A Barban Hill Balleny Dromore	£5,100	£3,000		-41.18
1021767	39D Culbane Road Ballynease-Macpeake Portglenone Ballymena BT44 8NZ	£3,100	£1,800	SR	-41.94

Property ID	Address	Current Net Annual Value	Reval2020 draft Net Annual Value	EX SR CASC	% Change
334903	8 Mullaghanagh Lane Ballynorthland Demesne DUNGANNON BT71 6EQ	£2,500	£1,450	EX	-42
154972	PLAYING FIELDS N104 Clandeboye Road Corporation Bangor	£770	£445	EX	-42.21
140904	N13B Fort Road Ballygrot Helen's Bay	£3,000	£1,700	EX	-43.33
1031041	FISHER PARK 70 Enniskillen Road Ferney Ballinamallard Enniskillen BT94 2HG	£6,400	£3,600	EX	-43.75
335235	97C Donaghmore Road Drumcoo Dungannon BT70 1HB	£5,000	£2,800	SR	-44
22404	GORDON PLAYING FIELDS Glenavon Lane Taghnevan Lurgan Craigavon BT66 8SZ	£34,000	£18,800	EX	-44.71
446267	PLAYING FIELD N32 Benone Avenue Benone Limavady	£6,000	£3,200	EX	-46.67
354447	9 Railway View Meetinghousehill Omagh BT78 1HL	£3,900	£2,000		-48.72
1004156	PITCH A 1 Cuilrath Street HARPUR'S HILL Coleraine	£570	£290	EX	-49.12
46799	59 Lisanally Lane Corporation Armagh BT61 7HF	£56,300	£28,500		-49.38
145640	PLAYING FIELDS N95 High Street Ballyphilip Portaferry	£710	£350	EX	-50.7
127057	BATTERY TOWER N42 Parade Town Parks of Donaghadee (Main Portion) Donaghadee	£60	£29	SR	-51.67
464253	53 Bells Park Road Glebe (Old) Clady Strabane BT82 9QX	£12,700	£5,700	EX	-55.12
1005130	13 Urbalshinny Road Dervaghroy Beragh Omagh BT79 0TP	£710	£310		-56.34
1024689	2 Laurel Lane Tamnaghvelton Tandragee Craigavon BT62 2GX	£2,750	£1,200	SR	-56.36
52064	67 Longstone Road Moneydorrugh More Annalong Newry BT34 4UY	£1,800	£750	SR	-58.33
1036969	PLAYING FIELDS N199A Berryhill Road Taboe Glebe Donemana	£10,700	£4,400	EX	-58.88
165804	BALLYHOLME SPORTS PAVILLION Seacliff Road Corporation Bangor BT20 5HT	£9,700	£3,050	EX	-68.56
66905	PEADAR ODOIRIN PARK 4 Bog Road Shean Forkhill Newry BT35 9SZ	£3,100	£830	EX	-73.23
358000	5 Crevenagh Road Campsie Omagh BT79 0EQ	£14,000	£3,250		-76.79
798606	10 Water Street Lisoneill Lisnaskea Enniskillen BT92 0LZ	£10,000	£2,150	EX	-78.5

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Finance how many staff car parking spaces his Department and its agencies have in Belfast city centre; and whether he is taking any action to reduce this number.

(AQW 1645/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department has 197 car parking spaces for use by DoF staff in Belfast city centre. DoF has around 1700 staff based in Belfast city centre.

These parking spaces are allocated in line with my Department's Car Parking Policy to Essential Business Users and to staff with a requirement due to disability. Essential business users are required to travel as part of their role.

My Permanent Secretary has been working with the other departments to review car parking policies across the Civil Service with the aim of reducing the requirement for spaces and I have asked that she keep me apprised of this work.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance to detail how many staff employed by her Department are currently involved in equal pay litigation or have equal pay grievances outstanding.

(AQW 1651/17-22)

Mr Murphy: According to Departmental records there are 18 staff involved in equal pay litigation and 20 staff have lodged grievances on the same subject.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW 869/17-22, why information on the location of Civil Service vacancies is not readily available.

(AQW 1668/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Complete information on the location of Civil Service vacancies was not readily available as departments may not inform NICS Human Resources (NICSHR) where a post is to be located until successful candidates are ready to be allocated.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the staffing compliment of the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland; and its budget.

(AQW 1678/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The Assembly's Audit Committee sets the Budget for the NI Audit Office (NIAO). It is not therefore a matter that my Department should comment on directly however my officials contacted the NIAO who advised as follows:

The staffing compliment for the NIAO as at 31 March 2019 was 106 (FTE 99).

Under section 6(2) of the Audit (NI) Order 1987, the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) must, for each financial year, prepare an estimate of the use of resources by the Northern Ireland Audit Office; this estimate is agreed between the NI Assembly Audit Committee and the C&AG, and laid before the Assembly. Under section 66(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the NIA Audit Committee should have regard to the advice of PAC and the Department of Finance in discharging its functions.

The Main Estimate for NIAO in 2019-20 was £7.805m.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Finance whether he has considered re-establishing the rural ATM scheme, which had been in existence from April 2007 but lapsed due to a lack of legislative cover in March 2017.

(AQW 1733/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The options for all rate relief provision for 2020-21 and beyond will need to be considered in the context of the recent Business Rate consultation, the wider budgetary issues that face us as an Executive and the decisions around the 2020/21 Regional Rate. During the consultation, support was expressed for the re-introduction of schemes such as the 'Rural ATMs'. This is something I will look at and give careful consideration to.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of staff vacancies in the Department for Communities, broken down by business area.

(AQW 1764/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The number of vacancies that NICSHR has been requested to fill on behalf of DfC is set out in the table below:

Business Area - Grade 5 Command	Number
DfC, Active Communities	7
DfC, Central Policy	5
DfC, Child Maintenance & Wraparound Services	17
DfC, Community Empowerment	8
DfC, Culture	4
DfC, Financial Management (FMD)	15
DfC, Governance & Commercial Services	3

Business Area - Grade 5 Command	Number
DfC, Historic Environment	8
DfC, Housing Supply Policy	4
DfC, Directors Office	1
DfC, Information Services & Property Management	17
DfC, Local Government & Housing Regulation	17
DfC, Pensions, Disability & Benefit Security	84
DfC, Public Record Office NI (PRONI)	10
DfC, Regional Development	2
DfC, Social Housing Policy & Oversight	1
DfC, Social Security Policy & Legislation Division	8
DfC, Strategic Policy & Professional Services	1
DfC, Transformation Communication & Engagement	9
DfC, Universal Credit (Operations and Programme)	100
DfC, Voluntary & Community	2
DfC, Work & Health Group Support	8
DfC, Work & Wellbeing	20
DfC, Working Age Services	32
Total	383

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance to outline the increase in the funding allocated to the small business rates relief scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1783/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The amount of relief given in each of

the last three years through the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (SBRR) and the annual increase, is set out in the table below.

Fiscal Year	Total SBRR	Increase From Previous Year
2016/17	£18,529,570.57	£531,497.45
2017/18	£19,406,965.71	£877,395.14
2018/19	£19,927,472.46	£520,506.75

My officials had no ability to change the SBRR scheme in the absence of Ministers. The scheme was extended annually by my Department from April 2017 on the basis that it retained the existing policy position that existed prior to the absence of a functioning Assembly.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance what plans his Department has to review the business rates relief scheme in light of the changes made in the rest of the UK.

(AQW 1784/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department currently legislates for over £235 million annually in business rate support including some £20m on Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR). The options for all relief provision for 2020/21 and beyond will need to be considered in the context of the recent Business Rates Consultation and the wider budgetary issues that face us as an Executive. I have already established that we simply could not afford the level of SBRR that is available in GB. However, we have Industrial Derating relief here that is no longer available elsewhere.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance how the business rates relief scheme compares with England, Scotland and Wales, in terms of (i) percentage of relief given; (ii) the bands for different rates relief percentages; and (iii) the maximum rates payment which qualifies for the scheme.

(AQW 1785/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The table below compares (i) percentage of relief given; (ii) the bands for different rates relief percentages; and (iii) the maximum rates payment which qualifies for the Small Business Rate Relief schemes, across the four jurisdictions.

	NI	England	Wales	Scotland
Small Business Rate Relief	£2000 (NAV) or less; 50% relief £2001-£5000(NAV); 25% relief £5001 - £15000 (NAV); 20% relief	Up to £12000(NAV); 100% relief £12000 - £13000(NAV): 75% relief £13000 - £14000(NAV): 50% relief £14000 - £15000(NAV): 50% relief	Up to £6000 (NAV); 100% relief £6000(NAV) - £7000(NAV):86% relief £7000(NAV) - £8000(NAV):72% relief £8000(NAV) - £9000(NAV):58% relief £9000(NAV) - £10000(NAV): 44% relief £10000(NAV) - £11000(NAV): 30% relief £11000(NAV) - £12000(NAV): 15% relief	Up to £15000 (NAV); 100% relief Then 25% under £18000 (NAV) for individual properties or Multiple properties with a combined rateable below £35000 (NAV)
Additional Support		Small Business Multiplier (i.e. lower poundage) for properties with a rateable value under £51,000 (NAV) Discount of 1/3 for retail businesses with a rateable value under £51,000 (NAV)		

Note: The table above details specifically with 'Small Business Rate Relief'; however, of the £235m reliefs and exemptions in NI many other business rate reliefs apply, including uniquely in NI, Industrial Derating.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance how much the Executive received in Barnett Consequentials for decisions made on business rates relief by central government, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1786/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Following decisions made by central government, Northern Ireland received Barnett Consequentials in relation to Business Rates Relief of £7.6 million in 2017-18, £33.8 million in 2018-19 and £39.4 million in 2019-20.

These funds are unhypothecated, meaning they do not have to be used for the purposes for which they were issued. Barnett consequentials are allocated in line with local needs and priorities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the current drawdown of borrowing by the Executive.

(AQW 1888/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The table below details the borrowing that has been drawn down, from the introduction of the RRI borrowing facility, to date.

RRI Borrowing

£million

	NLF Borrowing	On-Balance Sheet PFI	Total Use of RRI Borrowing Facility
2003-04	79.4	-	79.4
2004-05	168.7	-	168.7

	NLF Borrowing	On-Balance Sheet PFI	Total Use of RRI Borrowing Facility
2005-06	162.9	-	162.9
2006-07	214.6	-	214.6
2007-08	97.6	-	97.6
2008-09	16.6	243.4	260.0
2009-10	113.1	132.9	246.0
2010-11	36.9	200.0	236.9
2011-12	375.0	-	375.0
2012-13	150.9	-	150.9
2013-14	195.9	-	195.9
2014-15	259.2	-	259.2
2015-16	294.3	-	296.5
2016-17	213.7	-	213.7
2017-18	33.5	-	33.5
2018-19	66.7	-	66.7
2019-20 (Plans)	10.9	-	10.9
Total	2,490.2	576.3	3,066.5

Totals may not add due to roundings

The table includes RRI borrowing used for on-balance sheet Private Finance Initiative (PFI). In 2007 HM Treasury granted the Executive a concession in respect of PFI projects allowing the value of on-balance sheet PFI Projects to be substituted for RRI borrowing on the basis that it essentially represents 'borrowing' although from a different source.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance (i) how many business premises are currently vacant in (a) Ballymena; (b) Ballymoney; and (c) Ballycastle; and (ii) how many premises in each of these towns are occupied by charities with rates exemption.

(AQW 1889/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The (i) current number of vacant non-domestic properties in the (a) Ballymena, (b) Ballymoney and (c) Ballycastle town centres, as at 9th February 2020, is displayed in Table 1 (overleaf).

The information requested regarding properties occupied by charities is not available in the form requested as Land & Property Services does not have a classification specific to this in its rating database. Information on (ii) the number of occupied non-domestic properties that benefit from rates exemption in these town centres, as at 9th February 2020, has been provided instead. These properties include churches, halls, charity shops, educational establishments and some local authority properties which are for public use.

Table 1

Town Centre	(i) Number of Vacant Non-Domestic Properties	(ii) Number of Occupied Non-Domestic Properties with Rates Exemption
(a) Ballymena	180	52
(b) Ballymoney	66	19
(c) Ballycastle	29	12
Total	275	83

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of vacant domestic properties, based on rating records, in North Antrim.

(AQW 1890/17-22)

Mr Murphy: A total of 1,135 domestic properties in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency were recorded as vacant as at 31st January 2020.

Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes legislation on 1st October 2011, the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant, nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Finance to detail the Barnett consequential for the Executive announced during the 2019/20 financial year, providing their value on a per annum basis and stating when they commence.
(AQW 1940/17-22)

Mr Murphy: A range of announcements in 2019-20 have led to Barnett Consequentials for Northern Ireland. The Tables below provide details:

2019-20 Barnett changes announced Spring Statement 2019

£million

Type of Change	2019-20	
	Resource	Capital
EU Exit	18.3	8.9
EU Exit PSNI	9.8	
CT Police	5.0	
Knife Crime	2.5	
ONS claim for 2021 census	3.2	
MoJ Reserve claim	41.1	
Pensions pressures	93.0	
Network rail CP6 spend	20.3	-16.6
Local Government changes	16.5	
NHS	1.3	
Police	2.8	
Totals	213.6	-7.7

2019-20 In-year Barnett changes

£million

Type of Change	2019-20		
	Resource	Capital	FTC
EU Exit August 2019	31.0	0.4	
EU Exit Operational Contingency Fund PSNI	3.1		
EU Exit Operational Contingency Fund	4.0		
EU Exit Business readiness Fund	1.4		
Police Recruitment	1.4	0.0	
Commonwealth Games	0.9		
Health		39.3	
Late in-year adjustments	18.0		-59.0
Totals	59.8	39.8	-59.0

Following 2019 Spending Round, NI received Barnett Consequentials for 2020-21.

2019-20 Spending Round Barnett changes

£ million

	2020-21	
	Resource	Capital
Resource Baseline / Existing Capital Budget	10,683.0	1,373.9
Barnett Consequentials	419.9	9.6

These funds are unhypothecated, meaning they do not have to be used for the purposes for which they were issued. Barnett consequentials are allocated in line with local needs and priorities.

The 2020 Spending Review will set Budgets for 2021-22 onwards.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance, in light of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee recommendation seeking a three year minimum, moving to five year, multi-year ring fenced financial settlement to aid transformation in the Health Service, whether he has made a formal request for such a funding model.

(AQW 1947/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I am aware of this recommendation, and agree that single year budgets can be restrictive on longer term planning and transformation. I am therefore supportive of a multi-year ring fenced financial settlement to aid Health Service transformation.

Northern Ireland Budgets, however, are restricted by the wider UK Budget process which means we can only set a single year budget for 2020-21.

I anticipate that the 2020 Spending Review will provide a budget envelope for future years and the Executive will therefore be able to agree a multi-year settlement for departments as part of the Budget process.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance to detail the unspent money returned to the UK Treasury for the 2018/19 financial year.

(AQW 2007/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I can confirm that no departmental underspends in 2018-19 in non ring-fenced Resource DEL or Capital DEL have been returned. All departmental underspends in these areas have been accessed in the following year through the Budget Exchange Scheme.

Ring-fenced Resource DEL funding can only be used for the non-cash costs of depreciation and certain types of impairment. As this funding cannot be used for other purposes the amount unused at the year-end has not been accessed through the Budget Exchange Scheme. The amount in 2018-19 is shown in the table below.

Unfortunately a significant amount of Financial Transactions Capital funding has been returned. This represents unused funding as opposed to departmental underspends. The amount in 2018-19 is shown in the table below.

£million	2018-19
Ring-fenced Resource DEL	83.0
Financial Transactions Capital	171.9

Going forward, I am keen to ensure a significant uptake in the use of Financial Transactions Capital. My officials are liaising with the Strategic Investment Board to examine the issues and I have asked that they also engage with other departments to identify additional ways in which this funding can be used.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of vacant domestic properties, based on rating records, in East Belfast.

(AQW 2066/17-22)

Mr Murphy: A total of 777 domestic properties in the East Belfast Parliamentary Constituency were recorded as vacant as at 16th February 2020.

Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes legislation on 1st October 2011, the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant, nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Finance (i) how many business premises are currently vacant in (a) Banbridge; (b) Lurgan; and (c) Portadown; and (ii) how many premises in each of these towns are occupied by charities with rates exemption.

(AQW 2107/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The (i) current number of vacant non-domestic properties in the (a) Banbridge, (b) Lurgan and (c) Portadown town centres, as at 16th February 2020, is displayed in Table 1 (overleaf).

The information requested regarding properties occupied by charities is not available in the form requested as Land & Property Services does not have a classification specific to this in its rating database. Information on (ii) the number of occupied non-domestic properties that benefit from rates exemption in these town centres, as at 16th February 2020, has been provided instead. These properties include churches, halls, charity shops, educational establishments and some local authority properties which are for public use.

Table 1

Town Centre	(i) Number of Vacant Non-Domestic Properties	(ii) Number of Occupied Non-Domestic Properties with Rates Exemption
(a) Banbridge	83	30
(b) Lurgan	126	42
(c) Portadown	167	75
Total	376	147

Department of Health

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health what quality assurance measures are in place in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust to ensure patients' complaints are fairly and thoroughly investigated.

(AQW 937/17-22)

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): The Southern Health and Social Care Trust complies with the Department of Health's Guidance in Relation to the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure - April 2019. Complaints and complaint responses are reviewed by operational Directors prior to final approval to ensure that complaints are fairly and thoroughly investigated.

If a patient is still dissatisfied following the outcome of the HSC Complaints Procedure they have the right to refer their complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health what proportion of people who graduated from pre-registration midwifery training courses went on to work in the Health Service in each of the last five years; and what proportion were still working for the Health Service after one year.

(AQW 1200/17-22)

Mr Swann: Pre-registration midwifery training in Northern Ireland is delivered by Queen's University Belfast. Six months after graduation, the university conducts the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE) on behalf of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in respect of all graduates.

Results from this UK-wide survey for the most recent available year can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/destinations-2016-17>

No survey is conducted at the 12 month stage.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how many people are currently on a waiting list for talking therapies related to mental health, including counselling.

(AQW 1217/17-22)

Mr Swann: Please find information detailed below.

HSC Trust	Persons waiting for psychological therapies as at 31 December 2019
Belfast	1,484
Northern	538
South Eastern	1,302
Southern	552
Western	1,310
Regional Total	5,186

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of short break and respite beds, by location in each Health and Social Care Trust; and to outline any plans to increase provision.

(AQW 1221/17-22)

Mr Swann:

Southern HSC Trust	220
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Belfast HSC Trust	59
South Eastern HSC Trust	70
Western HSC Trust	33
Northern HSC Trust	52

It should be noted that the answer does not fully reflect the short break provision available to families/carers. For example, the use of foster carers, respite at home.

The Trusts are actively seeking additional provision and ways of increasing opportunities for short breaks although in some cases additional resources may be required.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Health what research has been carried out on the causes and potential medical assistance for sufferers of (i) lipoedema; and (ii) lymphoedema.
(AQW 1285/17-22)

Mr Swann: Within the last few years, two Northern Ireland studies on lymphoedema have been conducted. "A study on Breast Cancer-Related Lymphoedema Screening: Comparisons of Measures, Identification of Risk Factors and Implementation into a Clinical Setting" was completed in 2013. A second study is ongoing at present to carry out an analysis of genes and their functions in patients with primary lymphoedema.

The Health and Social Care Research and Development (HSC R&D) Division funds research infrastructure, including a Clinical Research Network, which supports clinical research in all disease areas. In addition, Northern Ireland researchers can access a range of funding streams from the HSC R&D Division and other local and national sources to allow them to conduct research on lipoedema or lymphoedema if they wish to do so.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health how many incidents of staff workplace injuries have been recorded in Muckamore Abbey Hospital in each month since 2016, broken down by causation.
(AQW 1383/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of incidents of staff workplace injuries recorded in Muckamore Abbey Hospital each month since 2016, by causation, is presented in the tables overleaf.

Number of incidents of staff workplace injuries recorded in Muckamore Abbey Hospital during each month in 2016

Month	Causation of injury		
	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in physical injury**	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in psychological harm**	Accident (e.g. slips, trips, falls, spills) that resulted in personal injury
January	44	44	*
February	41	45	*
March	60	58	*
April	57	60	*
May	67	73	*
June	65	88	*
July	70	74	*
August	77	69	*
September	59	49	*
October	80	76	*
November	86	73	*
December	59	56	*
Total	765	765	17

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

* Specific number withheld to protect staff confidentiality.

- ** Whilst an incident of inappropriate/aggressive behaviour towards staff may involve behaviours of more than one nature (verbal, sexual or physical), staff may select only one outcome for harm (resulting in physical injury, resulting in psychological harm or no harm) which best fits the main harm they experienced.

Number of incidents of staff workplace injuries recorded in Muckamore Abbey Hospital during each month in 2017

Month	Causation of injury		
	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in physical injury**	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in psychological harm**	Accident (e.g. slips, trips, falls, spills) that resulted in personal injury
January	53	40	*
February	53	45	*
March	49	45	*
April	49	59	*
May	76	62	*
June	78	86	*
July	55	90	*
August	48	79	*
September	60	65	*
October	67	96	*
November	98	89	*
December	76	107	*
Total	762	863	12

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- * Specific number withheld to protect staff confidentiality.

- ** Whilst an incident of inappropriate/aggressive behaviour towards staff may involve behaviours of more than one nature (verbal, sexual or physical), staff may select only one outcome for harm (resulting in physical injury, resulting in psychological harm or no harm) which best fits the main harm they experienced.

Number of incidents of staff workplace injuries recorded in Muckamore Abbey Hospital during each month in 2018

Month	Causation of injury		
	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in physical injury**	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in psychological harm**	Accident (e.g. slips, trips, falls, spills) that resulted in personal injury
January	58	108	*
February	65	103	*
March	99	100	*
April	116	122	*
May	126	167	*
June	71	125	*
July	118	94	*
August	138	109	*
September	101	93	*
October	90	73	*
November	112	104	*
December	106	84	*
Total	1,200	1,282	16

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

* Specific number withheld to protect staff confidentiality.

** Whilst an incident of inappropriate/aggressive behaviour towards staff may involve behaviours of more than one nature (verbal, sexual or physical), staff may select only one outcome for harm (resulting in physical injury, resulting in psychological harm or no harm) which best fits the main harm they experienced.

Number of incidents of staff workplace injuries recorded in Muckamore Abbey Hospital during each month in 2019

Month	Causation of injury		
	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in physical injury**	Inappropriate/ aggressive behaviour towards staff resulting in psychological harm**	Accident (e.g. slips, trips, falls, spills) that resulted in personal injury
January	147	76	*
February	122	68	*
March	100	77	*
April	113	88	*
May	132	86	*
June	84	93	*
July	86	120	*
August	75	91	*
September	88	90	*
October	78	99	*
November	96	75	*
December	59	91	*
Total	1,180	1,054	20

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

* Specific number withheld to protect staff confidentiality.

** Whilst an incident of inappropriate/aggressive behaviour towards staff may involve behaviours of more than one nature (verbal, sexual or physical), staff may select only one outcome for harm (resulting in physical injury, resulting in psychological harm or no harm) which best fits the main harm they experienced.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service response times in Upper Bann over the last 24 months; and how many call outs have missed his Department's response time targets. **(AQW 1404/17-22)**

Mr Swann: On 12 November 2019 the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) changed the way they prioritise calls, moving to an evidence-based response model, in line with the rest of the UK. Response time targets have also changed and cannot be compared with the previous standard. The response times you have requested, covering 24 months, are therefore reported separately.

From 1 January 2018 to 11 November 2019 the response time target was that an average of 72.5% of Category A (life threatening) calls should be responded to within 8 minutes (and no less than 67.5% in any Health and Social Care Trust area). In Upper Bann during this period a total of 7,053 calls were prioritised as Category A. Of these, 4,545 calls missed the 8 minute target. A total of 35.6% of responses to Upper Bann met the 8 minute target.

From 12 November 2019 to 31 December 2019 (the latest month for which figures are available) NIAS aims to respond to Category 1 (immediate life threatening) calls in an average time of 8 minutes and at least 9 out of 10 times within 15 minutes. During this period there were a total of 97 Category 1 calls in Upper Bann. In Upper Bann the average time for category 1 responses was 10:31 minutes, with 9 out of 10 responded to in 16:05 minutes.

I appreciate the hard work and commitment of NIAS staff, who are facing increasing demands on their services and challenges in achieving targets, but I also recognise that the status quo is not satisfactory.

However, a considerable amount of work has, and is, being done to improve this situation. A new Clinical Response Model (CRM), which completed public consultation in January 2019, has been developed following an extensive demand and capacity review. NIAS is currently developing detailed plans for the implementation of the new CRM, which will require significant investment in staff and resources.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health how many people sought help for gambling addiction problems in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 1408/17-22)

Mr Swann: The HSC Trusts do not provide a specific pathway for gambling addictions. Where problem gambling causes mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, appropriate help and support is provided in line with clinical need and current service provision for mental health. This include general Community Addictions teams within each Trust area which provide general assistance for those who suffer from all addictions. Further support is also available in the community and voluntary sector.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health whether any training is provided to medical or nursing students on gambling addiction.

(AQW 1410/17-22)

Mr Swann: The medical curriculum includes managing patients with mental illness, and with drug and alcohol misuse including the impact of brief interventions which may also be helpful in problem gambling but there is no specific element of the curriculum about gambling addiction.

The current nursing curriculum covers substance abuse and dependency as well as addictions, in which the principles of management are applicable to a variety of dependencies and addictions, but there is not a focus solely on gambling addiction.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health for an update on a new build GP practice for Lisnaskea.

(AQW 1485/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Western Health and Social Care Trust submitted a revised business case for a Lisnaskea Health and Care Centre to my Department. Delivery of this facility will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities, and will be dependent on future budget availability and value for money.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what action he will take to stop sex crimes taking place in hospitals.

(AQW 1493/17-22)

Mr Swann: Each Trust has protocols in place to prevent sex crimes taking place in hospitals.

Examples of measures in place include – security personnel on hospital sites to ensure a safe and secure environment that protects patients, staff and visitors; CCTV surveillance equipment; the use of chaperones for outpatient procedures and during intimate examinations; access control systems to restrict access to certain areas; lone worker policies; pre-employment checks of staff and the requirement that all staff comply with extant Child Safeguarding Policies, Procedures and Operational arrangements.

In addition, all Trusts have nominated Health and Social Care Trust Public Protection Principal Officers under The Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI). This refers to the system where there is a proactive multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach to help protect the public from serious harm posed by certain sexual or violent offenders. This is a legislative requirement.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health how many patients in the Mater and Royal Victoria hospitals are waiting for care packages before they can be discharged to their homes.

(AQW 1504/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department has a target to discharge 90% of complex discharges from an acute hospital within 48 hours of being declared medically fit for discharge. At midnight on Tuesday 4th February 2020, 6 patients were waiting longer than the target time for a care package in the Mater (3 for domiciliary care packages and 3 for nursing care packages); and 11 patients were waiting longer than the target time for a care package in the Royal Victoria (6 for domiciliary care packages and 5 for nursing care packages).

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Health whether there has been a change in policy for those patients who receive a yearly endoscopy check-up within the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1518/17-22)

Mr Swann: There has been no change in the policies for patients undergoing an annual upper oesophago-gastro-duodenoscopy (OGD Endoscopy) or for patients who would normally receive a colonoscopy every year for a condition called primary sclerosing cholangitis. The policy has also not changed for patients with colon cancer who undergo a check colonoscopy one year after their diagnosis.

New UK clinical guidelines on follow up endoscopy for people with previously detected polyps are currently being implemented within the Northern Ireland Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. These guidelines were jointly commissioned by the British Society of Gastroenterology, the Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland and Public Health England. They provide an evidence-based framework for the use of surveillance colonoscopy and non-colonoscopy

colorectal imaging in people aged 18 and over. They are the first guidelines that take into account the introduction of national bowel cancer screening. The guidelines are being implemented within bowel cancer screening programmes across the UK.

Each Trust is undertaking a validation exercise of all patients in a surveillance pathway for screening endoscopy and advising individual patients of any resultant change in their planned management.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of dementia sufferers currently cared for in (i) care facilities in each Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) their own homes and communities.

(AQW 1524/17-22)

Mr Swann: People are cared for in a range of care facilities and in their homes for various reasons which include a dementia diagnosis, however this may not be the primary reason they are receiving care and at present it is not possible to separate out this data.

The Dementia Services Programme – E-Health and Data Analytics Pathfinder (Phase II) due to finish in March 2020, will help in this regard. In particular the work being progressed around the General Practitioner Intelligence Platform (GPIP) will assist in the collation and analysis of data from GP Practice Dementia Registers.

A recent report commissioned for Alzheimer's Society by the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science (CPEA) "Projections of older people with dementia and costs of dementia care in the United Kingdom, 2019–2040" (November 2019), estimated that there were almost 885,000 older people with dementia in the UK in 2019, of whom 2.5% (22,000 people approx.) live in Northern Ireland.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Health what respite provision is available for young people under the age of 18 years with autism and other complex needs in Derry city.

(AQW 1525/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Western Trust provide a range of short break respite services, for disabled children and young people with autism, a learning disability, physical disability and/or with physical health needs or sensory needs.

While there is an increasing need for short break respite services, the nature of what families and professionals now aspire to is personalised provision that meets the specific and unique needs of children/young people.

Short breaks in the City currently include:

- Family based short breaks;
- Summer scheme provision;
- Community activities;
- Evening and weekend group activities;
- Afterschool activities;
- Domiciliary Care.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Health (i) why Rosebud Cottages in Derry is not open to provide services for families; (ii) when it will open; and (iii) what provision will be available.

(AQW 1526/17-22)

Mr Swann: The short break facility 'Rosebud Cottage' was temporarily closed to relocate to Racecourse Road, Derry, which required adaptations in order to meet required standards. These have recently been completed. It is planned that the facility will re-open on 30th April 2020. This facility will be registered for 6 beds once opened, providing a range of social care, educational and community activities.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Health what action he is taking to reduce the autism diagnosis waiting lists for children in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1528/17-22)

Mr Swann: Within the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST) the current demand for autism diagnostic assessment significantly exceeds the capacity of existing staff resources. A review of Children's Autism Services is being undertaken by the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board in which the Trust is actively involved.

In the interim, the WHST are taking the following steps to reduce assessment times:

- Slippage funding is being used for Overtime Clinics;
- Recruitment is ongoing for an additional Occupational Therapist;
- Recent investment will enable the Trust to develop an early intervention service, which will focus on the needs of children and young people presenting with emotional health and wellbeing difficulties. This service will be available to families awaiting diagnostic assessment and will provide family support to address any additional needs they may have.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health what additional budget his Department has secured to reduce waiting times.
(AQW 1542/17-22)

Mr Swann: Additional funding to tackle waiting lists has not yet been confirmed.

The scale at which I will be able to tackle the unacceptable waiting times will be greatly influenced by the outcome of the current budgetary discussions.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister of Health whether a Health Service patient, who has previously had one cycle of IVF treatment, will be entitled to a further 2 cycles under the new guidelines; and, if so, will priority be given to women who are approaching the age limit for receiving IVF treatment.

(AQW 1552/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am pleased that the New Decade, New Approach Agreement committed to providing 3 funded IVF cycles for eligible women.

The Regional Fertility Centre however does not currently have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for treatment arising from offering 3 cycles of IVF to all eligible women, as there are not enough trained staff to carry out the procedures, nor is there enough space at the premises to facilitate a higher number of patients.

My officials are currently giving urgent consideration to how this important issue can be taken forward and as such I am unable to give a definitive implementation date at this stage.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister of Health when three cycles of IVF treatment will be available.

(AQW 1553/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am pleased that the New Decade, New Approach Agreement committed to providing 3 funded IVF cycles for eligible women.

The Regional Fertility Centre however does not currently have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for treatment arising from offering 3 cycles of IVF to all eligible women, as there are not enough trained staff to carry out the procedures, nor is there enough space at the premises to facilitate a higher number of patients.

My officials are currently giving urgent consideration to how this important issue can be taken forward and as such I am unable to give a definitive implementation date at this stage.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Families Matter strategy.

(AQW 1584/17-22)

Mr Swann: Published in 2009, Families Matter is the extant family support strategy for Northern Ireland. My department is currently leading on the development of a new cross-departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy. It is intended to publicly consult on the draft strategy in the coming months. When published, the Family and Parenting Support Strategy will replace Families Matter.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what consideration is being given specifically to the development of support and pathways for people diagnosed with a rare disease, particularly those with complex needs.

(AQW 1589/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Northern Ireland Implementation plan for Rare Diseases – Providing High Quality Care for people affected by Rare Diseases – was published in October 2015. Since then, a range of actions have been taken by the Health and Social Care sector in collaboration with other Government Departments, local government, voluntary and community organisations, researchers and industry to progress the commitments in the plan for people living with a rare disease in Northern Ireland.

Actions have focussed on addressing the five main objectives in the UK Rare Diseases Strategy: empowering those affected by rare diseases; identifying and preventing rare diseases; diagnosis and early intervention; coordination of care, and the role of research. The Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland is working closely with its counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom to develop care pathways for those with rare diseases; and is continuing to work closely with the Northern Ireland Rare Disease Partnership in this and in creating support systems appropriate to NI's circumstances. In addition, there has been a focus on opportunities for cross-border collaboration on rare diseases initiatives with the Republic of Ireland.

A review of communication needs for patients with rare diseases has been commissioned and completed along with a training needs analysis for those caring for patients with rare diseases. An action plan is being developed to implement a NI Register for Rare Diseases. Through participation in the UK 100 Thousand Genomes Project whole genome sequencing has been made available based on clinical need to provide a genetic diagnosis where relevant.

Input has been sought from Northern Ireland stakeholders including patients and the public as part of a recent UK consultation to inform the update of the UK Rare Diseases strategy.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health whether he plans to instigate a review of hospital car parking, with particular regard to ensuring staff and carers of patients are not unduly penalised.

(AQW 1590/17-22)

Mr Swann: Whilst I accept that the implementation of car parking arrangements continues to involve difficult choices and decisions, if charging were to stop, the revenue raised to meet the cost of the provision and maintenance of car parking would similarly cease, ultimately reducing the amount of money I would have available to fund patient care.

Charging for car parking on some hospital sites where space is limited is also be an effective mechanism to creating churn in the utilisations of spaces, which helps to ensure that spaces are available for patients and visitors.

I therefore have no plans to review my Department's policy on car parking charges at this time.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health how many people in each constituency are waiting for drugs and treatment for cystic fibrosis.

(AQW 1598/17-22)

Mr Swann: Constituency data is not recorded as all cystic fibrosis patients are cared for within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The Trust has no waiting lists for the cystic fibrosis clinic or for treatment.

With wider access to cystic fibrosis medicines the number of patients potentially eligible for these therapies has substantially increased. To facilitate the safe initiation of these therapies all patients must undergo formal screening for eligibility, an individualised risk assessment, counselling on the administration of the drugs and the need for ongoing monitoring.

Patients with the most severe lung disease are currently prioritised for access to these medications.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health how many occasions, in the last three years, has the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service been short of emergency crews.

(AQW 1621/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has provided the data below on shifts not covered for the period requested:

Year	Number of shifts not covered	% of shifts not covered
01/04/2017 to 31/03/2018	3405 shifts	8.2%
01/04/2018 to 31/03/2019	4963 shifts	12.2%
*01/04/2019 to 31/12/2019	4716 shifts	15%

*Please note this is 9 months and not a full year.

Shifts may not be covered for a variety of reasons including compensatory rest, sickness/absence, vacancies, training and secondments etc. NIAS seeks to reduce the level of shifts not covered by its own staff, through the use of voluntary and private ambulances. Any shifts covered by voluntary and private ambulances are not included in the above figures.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health what action is being taken to ensure that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has the necessary resources to handle calls and service requests locally.

(AQW 1622/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am aware that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS), in response to steadily rising demand, has carried out an extensive demand and capacity review in relation to its services and developed a new Clinical Response Model.

NIAS is currently developing detailed plans for the implementation of this new model, which will require a significant investment in staff and resources.

In the meantime, NIAS is continuing to recruit and train additional staffing within existing resources and additional funding made available by my Department as part of the Health and Social Care Transformation Funds.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health to detail overtime costs for the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1623/17-22)

Mr Swann: The total cost of overtime worked by NIAS staff during each of the last 3 years are:

- 2018/19 £5,174k
- 2017/18 £6,710k
- 2016/17 £6,199k

The figures do not include employers' National Insurance costs.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health whether he has any plans to appoint a Deputy Medical Officer to oversee medical care for young people.

(AQW 1630/17-22)

Mr Swann: The appointment of a Deputy Chief Medical Officer (DCMO) with specific responsibility for children's healthcare is a recommendation from the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths (IHRD) and is being taken forward as part of the programme to implement the IHRD recommendations.

The current DCMO post has the responsibility for providing professional support and Departmental medical advice and leadership for the entire population. This carries an implicit responsibility for providing these functions for children. Current proposals are that the responsibility for professional support and Departmental medical advice and leadership for children is formalised more explicitly in the current DCMO role. It is proposed that additional resources in the form of a Senior Medical Officer will be recruited to the Department to support the DCMO in the discharge of these functions with the aim of improving patient safety for children.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health how many staff car parking spaces his Department and its agencies have in Belfast city centre; and whether he is taking any action to reduce this number.

(AQW 1646/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Department and its Arm's Length Bodies have 219 leased car park spaces in Belfast city centre.

Car parking needs are monitored regularly and pooling arrangements are in place. Plans to relocate a number of organisations from private sector office accommodation located in Belfast City Centre to Department of Finance owned accommodation should reduce car parking spaces and associated costs.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health what initiatives he is considering to relieve demand on GP services.

(AQW 1652/17-22)

Mr Swann: Initiatives to support GPs, drive transformation and deliver better care while decreasing bureaucracy and the pressure on GP services include:

- The GP Induction and Refresher Scheme which supports GPs to safely return to general practice following a career break or time spent working abroad. It also supports the safe introduction of overseas GPs. At the end of January 2020, 8 doctors had completed the scheme, with a further 3 completing the scheme.
- The GP Retainer Scheme which assists in the retention of GPs in primary care in Northern Ireland. At the end of January 2020, 22 doctors were currently on the GP Scheme.
- The introduction of Advanced Nurse Practitioners who are able to undertake comprehensive assessment of patients, formulate diagnosis and negotiate a management plan including prescribing treatment, monitoring health outcomes and making onward referrals as appropriate.
- There are currently 274 Practice based Pharmacists in place and all GP practices have access to their services and expertise, to support better medication management and prescribing for patients.
- Training non-clinical staff to help take on tasks such as correspondence, clinical coding, the deployment of decision support systems and introduction of technology to improve the service to patients and help GPs better manage workload.
- Increasing the number of GP training places available from 65 in 2015 to 111 in 2020 – a 70% increase.

We are reshaping primary care services. The roll-out of Multi-Disciplinary Teams is delivering new capacity and innovation into primary care, bringing services closer to our communities and improving access for all our citizens. We are delivering MDTs in every trust area, improving access to physiotherapy, mental health support and social workers. MDTs are a cornerstone of our plans to transform the health service and will make an important contribution to the long term sustainability of general practice.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the impact of delayed cataract surgery due to waiting lists, including the legal impediment to drive if the patient's condition deteriorates.

(AQW 1653/17-22)

Mr Swann: Cataracts related to aging often develop very slowly and patients diagnosed with cataracts are normally listed for routine surgery.

If a patient feels that there is a change in clinical circumstances which might affect their ability to drive, they can either contact their Optometrist or GP for re-examination or follow up referral.

The Hospital Eye Care Service will review the clinical information provided and determine if surgery needs brought forward.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health to detail the average waiting time from (i) primary care referral to initial cataract appointment; and (ii) cataract appointment to cataract surgery.

(AQW 1654/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on waiting times from primary care referral to initial cataract appointment is not held centrally.

The latest provisional figures, relating to quarter ending September 2019, indicate that the average waiting time, from the decision to admit, for cataract surgery in Northern Ireland was 37.1 weeks. These completed waits do not take account of any suspensions from the waiting list. It should be noted that patients who are admitted non-electively do not have a date waiting. Only elective surgeries are included.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health whether he intends to extend funding for the NI Primary Eye-care Assessment and Referral Services in each Health and Social Care Trust in the 2020/21 financial year; and whether he will consider funding the scheme for a longer period than a year.

(AQW 1655/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Northern Ireland Primary Eye-care Assessment and Referral Service (NI PEARS) is funded from the General Ophthalmic Services budget. The service is already provided across all Health and Social Care Trusts.

The ability to provide certainty of future funding for individual services is constrained by the time period over which the Northern Ireland Executive, and in turn the Department, are allocated funding.

The Department has faced consecutive single year budgets which is far from ideal in terms of financial management and the planning and management of our services. I will continue to seek the kind of multi-year funding commitments that are necessary if health and social care services are to be put on a sustainable footing.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health (i) to detail the number of patients in each Health and Social Care Trust who have accessed the NI Primary Eye-care Assessment and Referral Service (NI PEARS) since it was introduced; (ii) to detail the cost of this service per patient compared with a similar assessment and referral service provided by a GP; and (iii) how NI PEARS can reduce waiting times, increase access to eye-care services and relieve pressure from other primary care providers.

(AQW 1656/17-22)

Mr Swann: The numbers of patients accessing the Northern Ireland Primary Eyecare Assessment and Referral Service (NI PEARS) since it was introduced in March 2018 are set out in the table below by Local Commissioning Group (LCG) area.

The cost of the service per patient is £40 for a first assessment and £15 for a follow up appointment. The funding model for GP attendances does not allow for a direct comparison to be made.

	First assessment	Follow up
Belfast LCG	6,497	625
Western LCG	6,306	687
Southern LCG	9,258	988
Northern LCG	4,832	453
South Eastern LCG	3,628	400
Total	30,521	3,153

NI PEARS provides the first point of contact for patients who develop a sudden acute previously undiagnosed eye problem. There is appropriate regional provision, with 235 optometric practices across Northern Ireland accredited to provide the service. Approximately 80% of NI PEARS presentations are managed by the optometrist in practice without the need for onward referral, releasing capacity in both primary care GP practices and secondary care ophthalmology departments.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the spend on mental health services in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1660/17-22)

Mr Swann: Expenditure by Health and Social Care Trusts in the Mental Health Programme of Care, in each of the last three years, is set out below.

	2018/19 £m	2017/18 £m	2016/17 £m
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	86.6	82.9	76.6
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	61.7	60.8	57.8
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	41.8	39.8	38.0
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	48.7	46.0	42.0
Western Health & Social Care Trust	45.3	42.9	41.2

	2018/19 £m	2017/18 £m	2016/17 £m
Total	284.1	272.4	255.6

It should be noted that Trust expenditure within the mental health programme of care does not represent the totality of spending on mental health services, as services delivered by GPs and the Public Health Agency will contain a significant mental health component.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Public Health Agency's Review of School Therapy Provision. (AQW 1665/17-22)

Mr Swann: Following the review of the Allied Health Professions support for children with special educational needs in 2016, on-going progress and developments have taken place.

This includes the appointment of a Lead AHP Consultant for Children, Young People and Interagency Working within the Public Health Agency. This post aims to develop partnership working across the Department of Education, Department of Health, Education Authority, schools, the wider Health and Social Care setting and the Community & Voluntary sector, to ensure that Allied Health Profession support offered to children/young people with statements of Special Education Needs meet their assessed needs.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health to outline the timescale under which he will assess the responses to the consultation on Reshaping Breast Assessment Services. (AQW 1669/17-22)

Mr Swann: The public consultation on 'Reshaping Breast Assessment Services' closed on 30 August 2019, with 4,630 written responses received.

My officials have now completed the consultation analysis. I will make an announcement on the future of breast assessment services once I have had the opportunity to fully consider the responses and the best way forward for stabilising and improving these services.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health whether he will call a public inquiry into allegations of abuse and maltreatment at Muckamore Abbey Hospital. (AQW 1670/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am carefully considering the way forward as regards the events at Muckamore Abbey Hospital. Any decision I make will be informed by the views of the people who use the services at Muckamore and their families. I have visited the hospital site to engage with staff, patients, families and carers and listen to their views and recently met with the Action for Muckamore group.

I also have a responsibility to ensure that any process that is put in place to provide answers about what happened and why, takes cognisance of the ongoing major PSNI investigation.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what plans he has to (i) meet families affected by the Outcomes Report on Neurology Recall; and (ii) involve them in planning an appropriate response. (AQW 1672/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Department of Health has engaged with the patients affected by the Neurology Recall primarily through regular meetings with the Northern Ireland Neurological Charities Alliance (niNCA). This is appropriate given the large number of patients who were involved in the recall.

In addition, following the publication of the Cohort 1 Outcomes Report a meeting is to be arranged with a representative group of patients from the recall. This will provide the opportunity for the patients to set out their views on the recall directly to the Department in order to inform future planning.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what plans he has to review and update the Maternity Strategy, with specific reference to (i) a workforce planning dimension; and (ii) appropriate financial support for implementation. (AQW 1673/17-22)

Mr Swann: I intend to commence a regional review of Maternity and Neonatal Services shortly. The outcome of this review will be the identification of an optimal service configuration in relation to maternity and neonatal services for the next 10-15 years. One of the objectives of the project is to identify the workforce, training needs and associated costs of future service models. Any financial implications as a result of recommended investment or implementation will be subject to detailed business cases and funding approval.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Health whether his Department will take urgent action to resolve the ongoing telephony problems at GP practices in Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex.

(AQW 1684/17-22)

Mr Swann: GPs practices are responsible for managing their own communication systems for their patients.

I understand that the practices have been working with the line rental and phone infrastructure companies to seek to address the problems of telephone access. It is important for the patients of these two practices that these issues are resolved as quickly as possible.

I have asked the Health and Social Care Board to explore what might be done to support the practices.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Health whether his Department has considered updating guidelines in relation to blood donations, to fit within current Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs guidelines, published in 2017.
(AQW 1686/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am currently considering recommendations on blood donor deferral periods in the Donor Selection Criteria Report published by SaBTO in July 2017. I will make a statement on this matter in the near future.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health whether he will consider making the the drug Trikafta available to treat people with cystic fibrosis.

(AQW 1810/17-22)

Mr Swann: Trikafta does not have an EU or UK marketing authorisation and so is an unlicensed medicine. This means that this therapy has not yet been fully assessed by the European Medicines Agency or the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency in terms of its safety, quality and efficacy, and therefore it is not currently available for routine commissioning. If Trikafta obtains a marketing authorisation it will then be considered for routine commissioning under normal Managed Entry processes. Arrangements are in place for clinicians who may wish to consider prescribing unlicensed medicines to meet the unmet needs of individual patients.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on the cross-departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy.
(AQW 1833/17-22)

Mr Swann: I refer the member to the answer given to AQW 734/17-22 on 5 February 2020.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the planned upgrade of the Sydenham Bypass to a 3 lane carriageway.

(AQW 279/17-22)

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): The 2015 Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan proposed the widening of the A2 Sydenham Bypass. The preferred route was published in 2010, however, the development of the scheme has not been progressed any further.

I am committed to developing new integrated plans which deliver support for public transport, encourages more walking and cycling, better manages car commuting and promotes sustainable development all in an effort to improve the environment and people's lives. To this end, my Department is currently preparing, for my consideration, a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the upgrade to the junction of The Cutts, Dunmurry to include a right turn filter.

(AQW 913/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the importance of road safety and in particular the ongoing safety concerns of citizens using the junction at the Cutts, Dunmurry. I am also aware that a number of meetings highlighting this concern have taken place over the years with various elected representatives from different parties.

The present estimated cost for this proposed upgrade scheme is of the order of £1.8m. Unfortunately I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints that will restrict progression of schemes such as this, at the pace I would like. I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland including Dunmurry. However, I cannot at this time give any commitments in relation to progressing this or indeed any other specific scheme.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail her Department's financial contributions to each of the agricultural shows held annually, for the last 3 years.

(AQW 950/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department has made one financial contribution in the last three years (April 2017 to January 2020) in relation to attendance at agricultural shows. This was for a Road Safety Exhibition at the Balmoral Show from 10th-13th May 2017 which amounted to £4,847.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will explore the feasibility of the development of a Bannfoot Bridge.
(AQW 959/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department provided support for the development of a number of feasibility studies submitted by Councils under the Small Grants for Greenways programme in 2016. The development of a walking and cycling bridge at Bannfoot was not among the proposals submitted.

I am keen that my Department works with Councils and with all stakeholders to deliver on projects that have the potential to improve the lives of people, connect communities and increase the number of people walking and cycling in line with the draft Programme for commitments. However, this proposal would be for the relevant Council to consider in the first instance.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to ensure that illegally erected flags and emblems are not displayed on departmental property, including lamp posts and traffic signs.
(AQW 1023/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am acutely aware of the problem of illegal flags and emblems on street furniture. It is a persistent problem that requires a comprehensive and lasting solution.

Article 87 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 makes it an offence to attach unauthorised signs or advertisements to structures such as lamp posts. One of my Department's primary considerations is the safety of the public and where unauthorised flags or attachments pose a hazard to road users, my Department will seek to remove that danger. Where there is no such danger, my Department will liaise closely with other key stakeholders and seek to provide a solution.

I understand that The Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, which was established as part of the Fresh Start Agreement, has been tasked with exploring and finding consensus on a range of issues, including the flying of flags. This group has not yet concluded its work and will in due course report to the First and deputy First Minister.

I also note the commitments to respect for different cultures and identities contained in the New Decade New Approach. Finding a sustainable solution to the ongoing problem of illegally erected flags and emblems requires leadership and a united approach. I am committed to working with Executive colleagues and all stakeholders to deal with this issue comprehensively.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure what budget will be available from the City Deal to expand and extend the Glider system.
(AQW 1027/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Glider has been a great success in encouraging more people onto public transport and in reducing carbon emissions along Belfast Rapid Transit routes. I want to build on this success and am currently exploring what options are available to extend the service to North and South Belfast. Outline Business Cases for all projects are to be submitted by spring 2020, to allow Belfast Region City Deal partners to consider priorities and funding. The approval to extend Belfast Rapid Transit and the budget to deliver it will also be subject to Executive approval.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will prioritise first time MOT tests for people who have a health or mobility issue necessitating use of their vehicle.
(AQW 1039/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current situation is not acceptable and I have instructed the DVA to work urgently to get a safe, sustainable and trusted service up and running as soon as and as safely as possible. Testing on heavy goods vehicles and buses is continuing and the heavy duty lanes are also being used to prioritise all taxis and four year old car customers, for private customers and dealerships. All other customers except taxis and those with four year old cars will be automatically issued an MOT exemption certificate which they can use to tax their vehicle and thereby continue to drive. I have also instructed officials to ensure extended opening hours are in place in order to minimise disruption to customers and prioritise four year old car customers and taxis.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network. Their deployment has now been accelerated due to the current disruption. After independent assessments, three additional lifts are also now in operation. These five lifts are being used to test vehicles in the priority groups: taxis, four year old cars due their first MOT and vehicles in car dealerships which have been agreed for sale. The DVA has put in place a priority vehicle contact line (0300 2007 862) so those customers who fall into the priority group can have their appointments brought forward. If you have constituents who fall into this group, especially those with a health or mobility issue necessitating use of their vehicle, please bring this number to their attention and encourage them to call this helpline.

I have also instructed my Permanent Secretary to commission two separate reviews, which I will oversee. The first is an investigation of the timeline and events that led up to the situation that has arisen. I need greater assurance than I have at

present about the maintenance and testing regime in operation and about the way in which initial concerns about the lifting equipment were followed up and addressed. I want to know the precise timeline and to understand who knew what and when and all actions taken. This review is being carried out independently by professional auditors managed from outside the Department.

I have also commissioned a second review which is being carried out by an external expert who will provide me with independent advice on the steps that need to be taken to return our MOT centres urgently to a position where a full testing service can be provided. I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) what year the hydraulic lifts were fitted in MOT test centres; and (ii) what was the annual cost to have these hydraulic lifts checked.

(AQW 1095/17-22)

Ms Mallon: 53 of the DVA lifts formed part of a refresh programme of DVA testing equipment that ran from August 2011 until July 2012. An additional 2 new lifts were installed in Lisburn during November 2013 in order to increase capacity at that time. Two new vehicle lifts were also installed during February 2020, one in Belfast and one in New Buildings, Derry.

The annual spend on DVA Vehicle testing equipment maintenance is £559,108.32.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) how Translink's operating deficit happened; (ii) why it has been costed at £19m; and (iii) how does this compare with the previous five years.

(AQW 1186/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) As a result of severe cuts to the Department's budget from 2015 onwards, an annual revenue grant funding amount of approximately £13m was withdrawn from Translink.
- (ii) Revenue support of £19m was bid for in January Monitoring to allow Translink to fully cover its costs in the 2019-20 financial year. This bid to the Department for Finance was not successful.
- (iii) Translink's losses in the last five years range from £606k to £17m per annum.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there is a routine maintenance schedule in place for the A2 Shore Road, Rostrevor/Warrenpoint.

(AQW 1207/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Routine safety inspections on the A2 Seaview/Shore Road/Warrenpoint Road/Rostrevor Road are carried out on a monthly basis, and a visual inspection of the sea wall is carried out annually. Actionable defects noted during these inspections are issued as works orders to our contractors.

Additional routine maintenance is carried out on a cyclical basis. This includes weed spraying, grass cutting and gully emptying.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the A2 Shore Road Rostrevor/Warrenpoint has been subject to collapse and serious breaches of the seawall, whether her Department has a plan to address and reverse subsidence issues affecting the road.

(AQW 1208/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Routine safety inspections of the carriageway and footways are carried out on a monthly basis with a visual inspection of the sea wall carried out annually and following storm events.

While there is no immediate threat to the road, work to address local subsidence issues along the road has been programmed for completion in the coming weeks.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much has been spent on repairs to the A2 Shore Road, Rostrevor/Warrenpoint, in the last five years.

(AQW 1209/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Repairs works to the value of approximately £297,000 have been carried out on the A2 Shore Road Rostrevor/Warrenpoint in the last five years.

This figure includes both capital structural maintenance (resurfacing, structural drainage, structural stability and footways) works amounting to £276,000 and resource maintenance (carriageway patching, gully emptying and weed spraying) works amounting to £21,000.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what maintenance work has been carried out by her Department on the A2 Shore Road, Rostrevor/Warrenpoint, over the last 5 years.

(AQW 1210/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Routine safety inspections are carried out on this road on a monthly basis. Defects which meet current intervention levels are recorded and programmed for repair within designated timescales. Additional maintenance works, including weed spraying, grass cutting and gully emptying, are carried out on a cyclical basis.

In addition, resurfacing works at Seaview, culvert replacement works at Well Road, footway works at Orchard St Leonards as well as repairs to the seawall have also been completed over the last 5 years.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the four month MOT extension, how the Minister proposes that MOT test centres will have the capacity, even if fully operational, to test all vehicles (i) that have had the extension; and (ii) are due at the time.

(AQW 1219/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current situation is not acceptable and I have instructed the DVA to work urgently to get a safe, sustainable and trusted service up and running as soon as and as safely as possible. Testing on heavy goods vehicles, buses and motorcycles is continuing and the heavy duty lanes are also being used to prioritise taxis and four year old car customers and car dealerships. All other customers except taxis and those with four year old cars will be automatically issued an MOT exemption certificate which they can use to tax their vehicle and thereby continue to drive. I have also instructed officials to ensure extended opening hours are in place in order to minimise disruption to customers.

Two new lifts have been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Derry. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network. Their deployment has now been accelerated due to the current disruption. Three existing lifts have also been independently assessed and checked and are now operational.

The safety of all staff and customers is my priority. In ensuring safety, disruption has inevitably been caused to DVA customers. I want to assure you that officials in the Driver and Vehicle Agency are doing everything possible to resolve the issues as soon as possible and that I will continue to monitor this situation very carefully. I am determined that all options will be explored to minimise the disruption to customers and see the return of safe and fully operable MOT Centres across Northern Ireland as quickly as possible but the safety of staff and customers will continue to be my top priority. I have sought legal advice on a range of potential options to manage the transition back to full service.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the dates on which the vehicle lifts in MOT centres were installed.
(AQW 1227/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The DVA lifts formed part of a refresh programme of DVA testing equipment that ran from August 2011 until November 2013. Two new lifts were installed in January 2020.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many times the traffic lights at the junction of Edward Street, Francis Street and Parkview Street, Lurgan have malfunctioned; (ii) what the malfunction has been on each occasion; and (iii) the total costs of the repairs, in the last two years.

(AQW 1233/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) The traffic signals at Edward Street / Francis St / Sloan St, Lurgan have experienced two incidents of controller malfunction in the last two years.
- (ii) The first incident was caused by a card fault within the controlling unit and the second was an electrical fault.
- (iii) The first incident occurred under warranty and as such, my Department did not incur any cost; the second incident occurred more recently and we have not yet been invoiced for the repair works.

This location has also experienced over a dozen occurrences of signal heads being rotated mainly due to large vehicles catching the signal heads. My officials are currently assessing the site, to consider how we might help reduce the numbers of this type of incident.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to commence a review of (i) urban; and (ii) rural community transport schemes.

(AQW 1235/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I clearly recognise the important contribution that urban and rural community transport schemes make towards delivering Programme for Government ambitions and connecting some of our most vulnerable people and rural communities. However, severe constraints on my Department's budgets over recent years have resulted in reduced funding across a range of areas, including community transport and the public transport network with Translink. That has created significant challenges and is not sustainable if we, collectively, are to deliver on our Programme for Government ambitions to connect all our people and communities to the opportunities which many of us can take for granted.

I am committed to finding solutions to protect and maintain urban and rural community transport services. However, we all need to recognise that the benefits of community transport go well beyond my Department, impacting across the full range of

Programme for Government outcomes. The fact that health-related trips currently account for one quarter of all community transport journeys is a perfect illustration of those wider impacts.

At a time of constrained budgets, delivering my ambitions for community transport will require innovation, greater collaboration and cross-departmental working. I hope that Executive colleagues and all parties will support my efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable across our communities and rural areas can continue to benefit from that essential service.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of the safety standards of smart motorways, following an All-Party Parliamentary Group report on them.

(AQW 1237/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My officials are aware of both the benefits and safety concerns associated with All Lane Running and Dynamic Hard Shoulder SMART motorways.

As experience grows in the use of these types of measures, further intelligence will become available to help inform any future decisions relating to our own motorway network.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will (i) address traffic congestion on the Dublin Road / Gaol Square area of Enniskillen; and (ii) consider the development of a new entrance from Wickham Place to Tesco carpark.

(AQW 1240/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the frustration and disruption caused by traffic congestion on the Dublin Road / Gaol Square area in Enniskillen. However, I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints and need to assess the pressures across my Department, reflecting on my priorities, Executive Flagship Projects and the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" within the envelope of the budget made available for the period ahead.

In the meantime my officials in Western Division have introduced measures aimed at reducing levels of traffic congestion and will continue to seek ways to improve the efficiency of the road network. In this regard, you may be aware of the significant junction alterations recently undertaken at Dublin Road/Wickham link and the introduction of modern traffic signal technology to help improve traffic progression. However, the provision of an access from Wickham Place directly to the existing Tesco car park is not within my Department's remit and consequently would be a matter for the owners of the premises to consider and pursue through the normal planning process.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to non-illuminated reflective bollards and marker posts, to outline her Department's policy on (i) cleaning and maintenance; and (ii) replacement or renewal of defective / missing items.

(AQW 1242/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department carries out regular inspections of all public roads and footways, to ensure that essential responsive maintenance work is identified and completed as necessary. During these inspections, all defects are noted, including those relating to assets such as signs, bollards, and marker posts. Where these are found to be defective, missing or require cleaning to improve their visibility, appropriate works orders will be issued.

I have inherited severe budgetary constraints across my Department. The frequency of these inspections and the subsequent response times for repairs depends on the type of road and the volume of vehicular or pedestrian traffic. Town centres and major traffic routes are inspected monthly, while all other roads and footways are inspected at either three or six monthly intervals.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail planned road maintenance schemes for West Tyrone.

(AQW 1243/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Details of my Department's proposed maintenance programmes are not available on a constituency area basis. The West Tyrone electoral area is covered by our Fermanagh and Omagh East Maintenance Office and part of our Derry and Strabane Maintenance Office.

Within these Maintenance Office areas, details of planned schemes to be completed during the current financial year can be found in the Council reports presented previously to Derry & Strabane District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. Links to these reports can be found at;

- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/derry-city-strabane-district-council-report-spring-2019.pdf>
- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/annual-report-to-fermanagh-omagh-district-council-2019.pdf>

Budget allocations for the incoming 2020/21 financial year, and consequently our road maintenance works programmes, are not available at this time.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are plans to upgrade Omagh bus centre.

(AQW 1244/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has given approval to Translink to carry out a programme of works to upgrade safety at Ulsterbus and Metro bus stations with costs of £10 million. Omagh bus station is included in the programme.

The planned works are:

- lighting upgrades to current standards;
- new safety signage and ground markings;
- protective segregation bollards & guardrails; and
- resurfacing to bus stands after the installation of bollards

All works should be completed by Autumn 2020.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) what is the life of the lifts which are damaged at MOT centres; and (ii) when were they last replaced, in the case of each lift.

(AQW 1256/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) The manufacturer did not stipulate a timeframe for the life of a lift as this is subject to the number of cycles the lift will perform, the load applied and the condition of the lift maintained through a planned, preventative maintenance programme and inspection process.
- (ii) 53 of the DVA lifts formed part of a refresh programme of DVA testing equipment that ran from 1st August 2011 until 6th July 2012. An additional 2 new lifts were installed in Lisburn during November 2013 in order to increase capacity at that time.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many planning cases have been called in by her Department; (ii) of those, how many have been decided; (iii) how many have been approved; (iv) how many refused; and (v) the time taken in each case from call in until decision, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1257/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department for Infrastructure has called in 32 planning applications between 1 April 2015 and 30 September 2019 (inclusive), in line with the most recently published Official Statistics. Of these 32 applications, the Department issued decisions on 19, one application was withdrawn and 12 remain live on the planning system at the end of September 2019. Of the 19 decisions, all were approved. The information on the timeframe for decision in respect of the 19 cases for which decisions have been issued is set out below.

Application reference number	Brief description of proposal	Decision year	Processing time (weeks)
K/2013/0272/F	Windfarm conditions, Sixmilecross	2015/16	15.8
K/2013/0327/F	Windfarm conditions, Pomeroy	2015/16	19.8
K/2014/0328/F	Windfarm conditions, Carrickmore	2015/16	23.0
O/2014/0367/DCA	Old fire station demolition, Armagh	2015/16	2.6
C/2011/0459/F	Windfarm, Cam Burn, Coleraine	2016/17	60.2
LA04/2016/1528/LBC	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1529/LBC	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1619/LBC	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1620/DCA	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1621/DCA	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1622/DCA	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1623/DCA	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1624/DCA	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
LA04/2016/1625/DCA	Part of Royal Exchange, Belfast	2016/17	11.0
R/2013/0544/RM	Saul Road housing, Downpatrick	2017/18	38.0
R/2014/0091/RM	Saul Road housing, Downpatrick	2017/18	38.0
Z/2013/0930/F	Social housing, Glen Road, Belfast	2017/18	64.6
LA04/2017/1388/F	Transport Hub, Belfast	2018/19	87.8

Application reference number	Brief description of proposal	Decision year	Processing time (weeks)
P/2011/0792/RM	Fish farm, Kilkeel	2018/19	138.6

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many NI Water management staff have been granted a permanent change to contracted working hours, in the last twelve months.

(AQW 1271/17-22)

Ms Mallon: NI Water has advised that eight of its management staff have been granted a permanent change to contracted working hours, in the last twelve months. For the purposes of this answer NI Water has included any employee at Level 5 (HPTO/SO) and above as management staff.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many NI Water administration staff have been granted a permanent change to contracted working hours in the last twelve months.

(AQW 1272/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have been advised by NI Water that seven administration staff have been granted a permanent change to contracted working hours, in the last twelve months. For the purposes of this answer administration staff include employees at Level 6 (EO) and Level 7 (AO).

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many NI Water industrial staff have been granted a permanent change to contracted working hours, in the last twelve months.

(AQW 1273/17-22)

Ms Mallon: NI Water has advised that fewer than 5 of its industrial staff have been granted a permanent change to contracted working hours, in the last twelve months. For the purposes of this answer industrial staff include all Frontline Grades such as Operatives, Technicians & Craft Grades.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the legal requirements; and (ii) the policy concerning features and levels of provision required for service areas and other roadside facilities on motorways.

(AQW 1278/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 contains the power for the provision of service areas on our motorways. The three motorway service areas provided to date were led by developers from the private sector and these schemes, including the features and levels of provision proposed, were considered on their merits through the usual planning process.

The slip roads into and out of the services were designed using the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and these roads were designated and constructed as part of the motorway, under the powers of Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what road calming measures her Department can put in place on Ballyree Drive, Bangor.

(AQW 1279/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Traffic calming can involve a variety of features and one of the most effective methods of reducing vehicle speeds is through the provision of vertical traffic calming measures, such as road humps. Road humps are normally considered for residential areas, such as Ballyree Drive, where the main objective is to reduce average vehicle speeds to approximately 20mph.

I can advise that Ballyree Drive, Bangor has recently been reviewed by my officials and assessed as one of the higher priority schemes in the area. While I recognise the importance of safety schemes such as this and would like to do much more to help deliver safer communities, unfortunately I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints and this limits the number of schemes that can be delivered. I have raised these concerns with the Department for Finance and Executive colleagues. When there is greater certainty about available budgets for next year, I will review the scope to deliver more schemes of this nature as I recognise their importance to local communities.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what road calming measures her Department can put in place at Crawfordsburn Primary School.

(AQW 1280/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has provided a number of traffic management measures on Cootehall Road to advise motorists of the presence of the Primary School, and the likelihood of encountering children in the area. These measures include flashing school signs, high friction surfacing and most recently, formalised restriction of parking on the yellow zig zags at the school frontage, which are enforceable at the start and end of the school day.

Given the number of other schemes competing for inclusion within my Department's traffic calming and other programmes, it is unlikely that further traffic calming measures could be prioritised at this location at present. While I would like to do more in

relation to improving safety within our communities and in particular in and around schools, the severe budget constraints that I have inherited limits my capacity to do so. I have raised this issue with the Department for Finance and Executive colleagues in advance of the new budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface the junction at Movilla Road, Gransha Road, Killaughey Road and Ballyblack East, Newtownards.
(AQW 1281/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Unfortunately due to severe budget cuts, my Department has had to restrict its resurfacing work programmes across Northern Ireland. It is acknowledged that resurfacing at this junction and on Ballyblack Road East is required and these will be considered for inclusion in future programmes. Any recordable defects at the junction will be noted for repair in line with my Department's maintenance guidelines.

I have raised the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to maintain our roads and other growing pressures facing my Department. I will consider my options following confirmation of the next budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Wandsworth Road, Bangor.
(AQW 1282/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware you have been advised by officials from the local Section Office that Wandsworth Road, Bangor is included on a reserve list of resurfacing schemes for inclusion in a future works programme. Unfortunately, however, I have inherited severe and challenging budgetary constraints and my Department has had to restrict its resurfacing works programme across Northern Ireland. Consequently, I am unable to provide you with a definite timescale for when any work may take place.

In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are plans to resurface the footpaths at Wellington Drive, Bangor.
(AQW 1283/17-22)

Ms Mallon: While there are no current plans to resurface the footways at Wellington Drive in Bangor, a recent inspection by my Department's officials revealed a number of small areas of footway where the surface has become worn. Arrangements are in hand to have repairs carried out at these locations. Further work to remove several areas of moss growth on the surface will also be undertaken.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure why the January monitoring round details £19m to be allocated to meet a Translink operating deficit.
(AQW 1288/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The severe constraints in my Department's budget since 2015, has resulted in significant and sustained reductions to the funding available to support our public transport network. Translink has a Public Service Agreement with DfI which defines the routes it must operate and the level of Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding it should receive for operating socially necessary services. The budget constraints imposed on DfI over several years has resulted in reduced funding from the DfI budget to Translink over the last five years. Consequently Translink has been using its own reserves and any in-year monitoring round funding available to maintain the public transport network.

The in-year monitoring round funding in the current financial year has not fully addressed the PSO funding requirements nor the concessionary fare requirements, hence Translink is forecasting an operating loss of £19m in 2019/20. Translink's reserves have reduced by approximately £30m over the last five years. The current level of underfunding cannot be sustained without significant impacts on the public transport network.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of the impact of the introduction of legislation in 2017 for special events on roads on (i) community organisations; and (ii) organisers of local events.
(AQW 1295/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Roads (Miscellaneous Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 provides a power, which allows a road to be closed for the holding of a special event. Prior to the Act being commenced, roads had been closed by police using general policing powers, which were never wholly appropriate for the function. The legislation provides a framework aimed at ensuring that a special event can be held legally and safely on a public road.

The previous lack of formal procedures for holding events on roads means that some requirements will be new to those who have organised events previously and to assist such organisations, I understand that my Department previously provided guidance to help event promoters understand the new requirements. While the legislation was welcomed by many, I am aware that it does present challenges for some events and I have asked my officials to bring forward proposals for a review of its implementation and the extent to which it has delivered its original objectives.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans her Department has to support the re-establishment of the RADAR (Risk Avoidance Danger Awareness Resource) Centre.

(AQW 1296/17-22)

Ms Mallon: When RADAR opened in January 2016 it was a 3-year pilot. Since its inception, RADAR has had significant difficulty in securing sustainable funding. To enable the Centre to open and to allow time to seek a funding solution the PSNI agreed to provide funding. Despite the efforts of all partners including my Department, a sustainable funding solution could not be found. Given the inherited severe budget pressures across my Departmental there are currently no plans to support the re-establishment of the RADAR Centre.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) work done; and (ii) expenditure to alleviate flooding in South Fermanagh, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1310/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has undertaken a range of works to reduce the risk of flooding in South Fermanagh. In the past three financial years, just over £2.4 million pounds has been invested in this area. During 2016/17 £454,000 was invested in flood alleviation works and watercourse maintenance, with an additional £708,000 spent on raising roads to reduce the likelihood of them becoming impassable during severe flooding events.

Similarly, in 2017/18, £512,000 was spent on flood alleviation works and watercourse maintenance, with £46,000 invested in raising roads. In 2018/19, £693,000 was invested in flood alleviation works and watercourse maintenance.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the areas of Fermanagh and South Tyrone where (i) NI Water have no further capacity in their existing sewerage network; and (ii) planning applications have been refused due to NI Water having no further capacity in their existing sewerage network, in the past three years.

(AQW 1311/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) I am advised by Northern Ireland Water that there are 22 wastewater systems (treatment works and/or networks) with capacity issues in the areas of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Ten are in the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area and twelve are in the Mid Ulster District Council area.
- (ii) The refusal of planning applications rests solely with the relevant planning authority, and therefore NI Water does not hold these records. However, NI Water has assessed the planning response records it holds by Council area which are within or in close proximity of the electoral boundary of Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

According to NI Water records, with respect to parts of the Mid Ulster District Council Area, for the period 2017 – 2020, 32 responses out of 162 planning applications were identified as having no capacity in either the receiving Wastewater Treatment Works or Network.

With respect to parts of the Fermanagh and Omagh Council Area for the period 2017 – 2020,

10 responses out of 151 planning applications were identified as having no capacity in either the receiving Wastewater Treatment Works or Network.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given that it was called in a year ago, why has a decision not yet been reached on the hotel planning application for 37-41 Main Street, Portrush.

(AQW 1332/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since receiving the applications from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council on 25 September 2019, my officials have been reassessing the merits of the proposal based on all the information provided. My Department is also actively liaising with officials from DfC's Historic Environment Division and the applicant's planning consultants, and my officials will be preparing recommendations for me to consider as soon as is practical.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has plans to improve road safety at Doogary Road (A5), onto the junction of Seskinore Road (B83), leading to Fintona.

(AQW 1341/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The proposed A5 dual carriageway project would replace this junction with a new roundabout connecting this existing road to the new dual carriageway. In the interim I have asked Officials to carry out traffic surveys to help gain a better understanding as to how the junction performs and to determine if there are any low cost measures which could be considered to help reduce congestion and improve safety.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many unadopted roads there are in private developments; and (ii) the planned cost, broken down by Division.

(AQW 1342/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department maintains records of roads within private developments that are being proposed for adoption into the public road network. When development roads are proposed for adoption, they are normally constructed and adopted in phases. Each phase contributes to the wider road network within the housing development. Developers are required to enter into a legal agreement with the Department for adoption of these roads, which includes a bond to cover the cost of constructing roads in these private developments, before starting any works.

The value of these bonds is reduced as developers progress construction of their private development roads. Details of the remaining value of bonds for each Division, which represents the cost of completing roads in private developments, are set out in the table below:

Division	No. of bonded road phases	Remaining value of bonds
Eastern	659	£25.43m
Northern	644	£19.8m
Southern	1022	£28.76m
Western	782	£28.97m
Total	3107	£102.96m

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to develop a contingency fund for unadopted developments which have been abandoned due to health and safety concerns, including lack of functional street lights, uneven or raised sewers and no road maintenance.

(AQW 1343/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 requires developers to make financial provision for the cost of providing roads, footpaths, drainage and street lighting, for developments where the layout of roads and footways has been determined for adoption into the public road network. Similarly, the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, requires developers to make financial provision for the cost of providing any sewer, drain, sustainable drainage system or wastewater treatment works, if they wish to ensure a connection to the public sewer network and have their infrastructure adopted and maintained by NI Water. Such agreements for the provision of new development roads and associated infrastructure are secured by a bond, which is a financial surety that allows my Department and NI Water to complete any required works if the developer defaults.

My Department has no legal powers to develop a contingency fund to complete such infrastructure in private developments at public expense, in cases where no prior agreement and bond have been put in place to provide for their completion and adoption.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will amend senior smart passes for over 65s so that eligibility for journeys all over Ireland, both North and South, is stated explicitly on the pass.

(AQW 1348/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Free travel on public transport for senior citizens on the island of Ireland plays a major part in maintaining links with friends, family and communities and building all island connections.

There are approximately 260,000 Senior 65+ SmartPasses in circulation and I have asked officials to investigate the benefits and practicalities of amending Senior 65+ SmartPasses so that eligibility for journeys all over Ireland, both North and South, is stated explicitly on the pass. In the interim I have asked for information on NI Direct, and the documentation that accompanies a Senior 65+ SmartPass when it is issued to an individual, to be amended to better inform people of their entitlements.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface The Green, Conlig.

(AQW 1352/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at The Green, Conlig. As with all roads, the condition of The Green in Conlig is subject to periodic inspections and monitoring and it may be included in future work programmes.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how her Department regulates private car parking companies.

(AQW 1358/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has no legislative powers in relation to the regulation of private car parks.

Parking in private car parks is governed by the terms and conditions set out on the signage at each individual site. Such terms and conditions would normally set out the circumstances under which motorists are authorised to park and the associated charges and potential penalties in the event of these being breached.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of the legitimacy of private car parking companies issuing Parking Charge Notices or invoices.

(AQW 1359/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I appreciate that the issue of private parking companies and associated charges can be contentious, however as my Department has no legislative powers in relation to the regulation of private car parks it would be inappropriate for me as Minister to comment further.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on plans to provide an hourly Enterprise service between Belfast and Dublin.

(AQW 1369/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In line with the Better Connecting Dublin & Belfast Enterprise strategy, Translink and Iarnród Éireann are currently developing a business case for the introduction of an hourly rail service between Belfast and Dublin. I will be considering that business case in the context of my commitments to improving all-island connectivity for the benefit of our economy and communities across Northern Ireland. New Decade New Approach identifies an ambitious agenda for North South connectivity including support for the Better Connecting Dublin & Belfast Strategy. Pursuing that agenda in cooperation with the Irish Government within the resources available will be my priority. I will continue through the NSMC to explore how we advance and build on the ambitions of "New Decade: New Approach".

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of claims received by her Department for damage caused by road defects, broken down by constituency, for each of the last three years.

(AQW 1370/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department does not record claims according to constituency areas but instead records claims by Section Office areas, which broadly align with Council areas.

The table below details the number of vehicle damage claims received for damage caused by road defects in each of the last three financial years for each Section Office.

Section Office Name	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon East	106	253	229
Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon West	122	268	210
Antrim and Newtownabbey	172	341	251
Ards and North Down	174	368	261
Belfast North	246	274	227
Belfast South	136	196	155
Causeway Coast and Glens East	89	167	105
Causeway Coast and Glens West	67	149	95
Derry and Strabane	114	242	169
Fermanagh and Omagh East	78	261	162
Fermanagh and Omagh West	89	216	142
Lisburn and Castlereagh	227	506	435
Mid and East Antrim	148	437	256
Mid Ulster North	110	447	256
Mid Ulster South	81	144	102
Newry and Down East	126	210	181
Newry and Down West	226	346	429

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she intends to address the backlog of street light repairs needed across the North Antrim constituency.

(AQW 1393/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand the concerns of the public affected by street light outages and am working with my Department to address this issue as quickly as possible. Unfortunately as a result of severe budget cuts the Department has had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result, outages are taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired. I can assure the Member that priority is being given to hazardous electrical defects

and group outages and that my officials are doing all that they can, within available budgets, to complete other repairs in as timely a fashion as possible. I have also raised this issue with Executive colleagues and pressed the importance of additional funding to address this issue and ensure public safety and confidence.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for her assessment of the Travel to and from school by pupils in Northern Ireland 2018/19; (ii) to outline her plans to address the issues raised in the report; (iii) how she is working with other Departments to address the issues raised in the report; and (iv) to outline an expected timeframe for her actions.
(AQW 1394/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am very disappointed that there has been a reduction in the proportion of primary school pupils walking or cycling to school from 32% to 23% since 2013/14. This highlights the challenge that we face in changing our travel habits to more sustainable behaviours.

In terms of addressing the issues raised in the 'Travel to and from school by pupils' 2018/19 report, I want to take some time to carefully consider how best to address the barriers to walking and cycling – including the journey to and from school. In doing so, I am keen to work with other Departments and stakeholders to address the key issues.

Currently, my Department jointly funds (with the Public Health Agency) the Active School Travel Programme. This programme is operated in sixty new schools each year with the aim of encouraging children to travel to school by walking, cycling, scooting or other sustainable means. In addition, every primary school is invited to participate in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme. In 2019/20, almost 350 primary schools and over six thousand children participated. Thirdly, the Practical Child Pedestrians Safety Training programme is offered to selected schools in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland. In 2019/20, 40 primary schools and almost 1,500 children participated in the scheme. My Department also provides schools with free road safety teaching resources.

Developing active travel policies is something that I am keen to progress within the budget that is made available to me. However, it is too early for me to be in a position to provide a timeframe for further actions.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure what cycling provision was scoped for inclusion in the Duncairn Gardens road improvement scheme.
(AQW 1406/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Under Article 8 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993, my Department has a statutory duty to maintain the road network. The resurfacing of Duncairn Gardens was undertaken to provide a safe road for all road users for years to come and to satisfy the requirements of the above legislation. The road layout was not altered. I am looking closely at what options exist to increase cycling provision for our local communities and I would be happy to update the Member as this develops.

As part of my focus on connecting communities and encouraging greater sustainable transport options, I will be considering how best to deliver my priorities when the Budget process provides clarity on the resources to be made available to my Department.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Infrastructure when she intends to bring forward legislation to change the classification of electric cycles to allow their introduction.
(AQW 1415/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Britain and Ireland.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence. In the case of insurance EAPC owners/riders should consider the need for insurance that covers areas such as damage, theft, personal injury and liability when the proposed legislative changes come into force.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the new procedures being introduced in relation to meeting requests by elected representatives with her departmental staff.
(AQW 1422/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Following the return of the Assembly, it is right that my Department has in place good procedures to ensure that queries from elected representatives are handled promptly and effectively and that proper records are kept. It is also important that, as Minister, I receive regular updates on the issues and concerns being raised by members on behalf of constituents. I am keen that Members contact me directly on any matter that they feel needs my attention or that of my officials but they can also, of course, write to officials on local issues. Officials will continue to meet elected representatives on my behalf on local issues of concern and will report back to me on progress.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many applicants for a taxi licence have failed the theory test, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1429/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Before a new applicant can apply for a taxi licence, they must first have passed both the taxi driver theory and practical tests. Existing taxi drivers who are applying to renew their taxi driver licence are not required to take these tests. Therefore, all applicants for a taxi driver licence in the last 5 years have either passed both the taxi driver theory and practical tests, or were not required to pass them because they were renewing their taxi driver licence.

The table below provides the number of taxi driver theory tests failed and the number of individual candidates who have failed in each of the last five years.

	Taxi Driver Theory Tests Failed	Individual candidates who have failed Test
2015/16	512	223
2016/17	919	406
2017/18	931	434
2018/19	932	424
2019/20 (Apr-Sep)	446	223

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she intends to carry out a review of all costs placed on taxi drivers for (i) driving licences; (ii) car test fees; (iii) operator licence fees; and (iv) meter testing fees.

(AQW 1431/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the important role that the taxi industry plays in our communities by providing a valuable service every day, to businesses in our cities, towns and rural communities and to our tourist industry.

I understand that there are a number of areas of the current taxi regime that continue to generate both interest and concern amongst stakeholders and I intend to consider these issues in greater detail in the coming weeks.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether she intends to proceed her Department's proposals regarding the Experimental Traffic Control Scheme (Permitted Taxis in Bus Lanes) 2018; and (ii) for her assessment of the impact of these proposals on sustainable forms of transport, most notably cycling and buses.

(AQW 1437/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the important role that the taxi industry plays both to transport networks and also to communities, by providing a valuable service every day to people and businesses in our cities, towns and rural communities.

I also understand that there are a number of areas of the current taxi regime that continue to generate both interest and concern amongst stakeholders, including the Experimental Traffic Control Scheme (Permitted Taxis in Bus Lanes) 2018.

I would like to take the time to consider these issues in greater detail in the coming weeks.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many parking tickets were issued in towns in Co Tyrone, in the last three years.

(AQW 1449/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There were 28,718 Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's) issued in towns in Co Tyrone in the 3 years from 1st January 2017 to the 31st December 2019. PCN data is published on the Open Data NI Portal and I have attached a link below, which I trust you will find helpful.

<https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/dataset/penalty-charge-notice-data>

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Moss Road, Millisle.

(AQW 1455/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that the resurfacing of roads is a concern to members of the public and while I recognise the importance of this matter. I have however inherited severe and challenging budget constraints which inevitably impacts on my Department not being able to do all that I would like it to for communities across Northern Ireland. Despite these pressures, I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better for our communities.

My officials have identified that a section of Moss Road leaving the village would benefit from resurfacing in a future works programme and consideration will be given to include this road in a future works programme for Ards and North Down Borough subject to available funding and prioritisation alongside other roads in need of resurfacing.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface William Street, Donaghadee.

(AQW 1456/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's budget allocation for 2020/21 is still to be determined. However, subject to funding being available, it is planned to carry out a scheme to fully reconstruct William Street, Donaghadee, which will include resurfacing. In the meantime, any recordable defects at the junction will be noted for repair in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Churchill Avenue, Millisle.

(AQW 1457/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Churchill Avenue, Millisle. As with all such roads, the condition of Churchill Avenue, Millisle will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and it may be included in future programmes. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at these locations will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have raised the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I will consider my options following confirmation of the next budget.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure how NI Water is engaging with (i) local councils; and (ii) local communities to highlight the costs and inconvenience caused by blockages in the sewerage system as a result of inappropriate materials entering sewers.

(AQW 1468/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) I am advised by NI Water that it has been engaging with all 11 local councils on their recent Blocked Pipes Campaign, including through the issue of a press release for each area.
- (ii) NI Water engages with the local community through its advertising campaign, which focuses on two key themes:
 - 1 - You should only flush pee, poo and toilet paper (3 Ps) – anything else will block the pipes.
 - 2 - Stop and think, not in the sink – Fats, oils and grease will block sewers.

From 2 Dec 2019 – 12 Jan 2020, a campaign ran on TV, outdoor posters and social media, with a focus on the fats oils and grease message. From 2 Mar 2020 – 15 Mar 2020, a campaign will run on TV, radio and outdoor posters, which will focus on NI Water's 3 Ps message. Additionally, NI Water has an Education Team, who visit schools across the country to deliver key messages. A total of 297 schools were visited in the period 1st Jan 2019 – 31st Jan 2020.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether her plans to address issues with the sewerage infrastructure will include increasing the sewerage capacity in the (a) Waringstown; and (b) Donaghcloney areas; and (ii) whether she will treat this as a priority.

(AQW 1475/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Waringstown WwTW, which also receives sewage from the Donaghcloney area, has been included as part of NI Water's upgrade programme for the Price Control 21 period (2021/22 to 2026/27) In addition, NI Water is developing a sewer catchment model for the area which will be used to identify network upgrade options for addressing capacity issues.

The prioritisation of works during any Price Control period is led by the Utility Regulator, in consultation with NI Water and its other statutory regulators. The delivery of treatment and network upgrades is also dependent on adequate funding being made available to NI Water during the Price Control period. As Minister, I have inherited a range of capital pressures and, although I am determined to prioritise investment in water and wastewater infrastructure, I am also conscious of the need to address regional imbalance, improve connectivity and address climate change within current budget restrictions.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to review the eligibility criteria for providing on-street parking for disabled residents adjacent to their homes.

(AQW 1477/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's current policy for the provision of accessible bays in response to requests from individuals, was last reviewed and updated in 2017. This update amended the eligibility criteria for a bay, to allow for the introduction of Personal Independence Payments. It also expanded the eligibility criteria to include: those who receive a War Pension Mobility Supplement; those who receive a benefit under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme; and, those who are registered blind.

While I have no current plans to undertake a review, I can confirm that if a need is identified, I will consider it.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to amend the Blue Badge eligibility criteria to include people with Parkinson's, dementia, epilepsy and other 'invisible' disabilities, in line with changes introduced by the Department for Transport.

(AQW 1478/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am pleased to confirm that within the Blue Badge Scheme's existing criteria, my Department already considers applications from people with an invisible disability.

A person who has an invisible disability can apply for a blue badge under section C3 of the assessed eligibility section of the application form. This takes into consideration a person who may be at risk of harm to the health and safety of themselves or any other person, or who is unable to plan or follow a journey without another person for assistance.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the expenditure per head of population for cycling, in 2018/19.

(AQW 1480/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department does not identify spend on walking and cycling separately but includes both in funding for active travel. It is also worth noting that the attribution of spend to active travel is not a precise exercise as some projects have benefits for active travel even if not carried out specifically for that purpose. Equally, there are cycling-related projects which have benefits for walking and other active travel modes additional to the cycling benefit. Finally, it is worth noting that other Departments, Councils and other agencies may provide additional funding for walking and cycling promotion and infrastructure development.

In 2018/19, expenditure by my Department that can be attributed directly to walking and cycling was just over £5 million. This included spend of £1.66 million of resource funding on various programmes including the Active School Travel Programme, the Cycling Proficiency Scheme, advertising development and airtime as well as £3.4 million on capital infrastructure schemes. Based on a Northern Ireland population of approximately 1.9 million that equates to a spend per head of population on walking and cycling in 2018/19 of approximately £2.70. This figure represents an increase of around 75% on the previous year.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the flood mitigation measures currently being proposed as a result of the Eglinton feasibility study.

(AQW 1491/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The feasibility study for Eglinton has recently been completed. The scheme involves the construction of approximately 2,700 metres of flood defences and a range of other smaller works.

The next stage is to test the proposals from a value for money and deliverability perspective and this work is now in hand. I am keen that it is brought to a swift conclusion and hope to be able to provide a further update on the timing for this important scheme in the near future.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure when will the exemption for Electrical Assisted Pedal Cycles for (i) licensing; and (ii) insurance be legislated for to bring us in line with Great Britain.

(AQW 1498/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Britain and Ireland.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence. In the case of insurance EAPC owners/riders should consider the need for insurance that covers areas such as damage, theft, personal injury and liability when the proposed legislative changes come into force.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department plans to implement 20 mph zones outside schools.

(AQW 1507/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. I believe that reducing the maximum speed traffic can travel at on some of our roads, particularly those near schools, can help.

My Department is committed to introducing measures that reduce the speed of traffic on our roads. We are currently trialling an arrangement of signs that is intended to allow the introduction of more part-time 20mph limits at schools. We are also trialling the effectiveness of 'signed only' 20mph limits. These would be more economical, and could be used more widely in appropriate environments, such as residential areas with schools, than would be possible with the current approach of providing 20mph limits along with traffic calming features. I fully intend to see what potential there is from these trials, to build on the work already underway.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's reasons for the refusal to install speed ramps on Duncastle Road, Londonderry.

(AQW 1508/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current criteria through which traffic calming requests are assessed includes factors such as speed and volume of traffic, the most up to date three years personal injury collision statistics and environmental factors such as the proximity of public buildings and the nature of the road. The use of traffic calming deflection measures such as speed humps is ordinarily restricted to residential streets/developments/estates and not used on roads whose primary function is to facilitate through traffic and where there is no convenient alternative route available. The B48 Duncastle road is a through road linking Dunnamanagh and New Buildings and it is not considered appropriate to introduce speed humps on this route.

I am advised that My Department are not aware of any recent request having been made for traffic calming on this road and therefore are unaware of any refusal having issued.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how she plans to improve road safety on Strathroy Road, Omagh.

(AQW 1519/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The opening of the Strathroy Link Road in November 2019 provided an important connection between the Gortin Road and the A5 at the northern approach to Omagh. The new road is an important addition to the road network in the area, in advance of the planned Strule Educational Campus. I do however recognise that the Strathroy Link Road has attracted increased traffic to the Strathroy Road and thereby changed the character of what had been a local suburban access road.

When traffic patterns have settled down, my officials plan to undertake fresh traffic surveys, to help establish the impact of the new link road and assess the need for any new safety measures for inclusion in the Local Transport and Safety Measures Works Programme.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure how her Department plans to improve access to public transport for people with mobility issues in West Tyrone, who currently have to give 24 hours' notice to Translink.

(AQW 1520/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In the main, town services in West Tyrone are delivered using accessible low floor buses either for every journey, or specific journeys as indicated on the timetables. These services do not require advance booking. Advance booking is however necessary for Translink Goldline Express services, as a combination of high and low floor buses are used on these routes. Whilst both of these vehicle types are wheelchair accessible, on high floor coaches access is by a side lift which can be difficult to deploy at bus stops, and requires the removal of seats to create the wheelchair space. Wheelchair users are therefore encouraged to contact Translink in advance to ensure a low floor vehicle is on the service.

I am clear that investment in public transport infrastructure is the bedrock on which we deliver our Programme for Government outcomes, and it is for that reason my focus will be on developing solutions that improve people's lives, including those with mobility impairments, helping them to engage more fully in both social and economic activities and unlock economic potential. I recognise the current requirement to provide advance notice on Goldline Express services is not ideal. However, Translink continue to engage with manufacturers on future options for bus purchases to improve accessibility to meet the needs of customers.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Springfield Avenue, Bangor.

(AQW 1535/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no current plans to carry out resurfacing at Springfield Avenue, Bangor. The road will, however, continue to be subject to monitoring during periodic inspections and may be included in a future work programme. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface (i) Beatrice Road; and (ii) Beatrice Avenue, Bangor.

(AQW 1536/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Beatrice Road or Beatrice Avenue, Bangor. As with all such roads the condition of Beatrice Road and Beatrice Avenue will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and may be included in future programmes. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at these locations will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for

winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Alfred Street, Bangor.
(AQW 1537/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Alfred Street, Bangor.

As will all roads, the condition of Alfred Street will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and may be included in future work programmes. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Prospect Road, Bangor.
(AQW 1538/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Prospect Road, Bangor.

As with all roads, the condition of Prospect Road will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and may be included in future programmes. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Hawthorne Drive, Bangor.
(AQW 1539/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Hawthorne Drive, Bangor. As with all roads, the condition of Hawthorne Drive, Bangor will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and may be included in future programmes. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at these locations will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Infrastructure how will her Department increase capacity to repair faulty street lighting in the Newry and Armagh constituency.
(AQW 1540/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand and share the concerns of those affected by street light outages and am working with my Department to address this issue as quickly as possible. Unfortunately as a result of severe budget constraints over a number of years, the Department has had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result, outages are taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired. I can assure the Member that priority is being given to hazardous electrical defects and group outages and my officials are doing all they can, within available budgets, to complete other repairs in as timely a fashion as possible. I recognise the importance of this issue and I am engaging with Executive Colleagues in the hope of securing additional resource to increase capacity to repair faulty street lighting in Newry and Armagh and across Northern Ireland.

Ms Ennis asked the Minister for Infrastructure when her Department will provide the necessary funding for the Milltown Street, Burren phase 2 footlink to commence?
(AQW 1543/17-22)

Ms Mallon: You will be aware that officials have carried out an assessment for the provision of an additional footway link at this location, using the criteria that I have inherited from previous Ministers. Unfortunately, it did not meet the threshold required to merit consideration for further development.

However, I shall be reviewing, in due course, the arrangements for making such assessments to ensure that the approach presently in place remains fit for purpose. The extent of works for schemes of this nature will also be determined by the forthcoming budget allocated to my Department.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the changes being brought forward in relation to the use of electronic bikes; and (ii) whether they will now be treated in the same way as in Great Britain.

(AQW 1545/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the disparity with Britain and Ireland.

I have therefore decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Owners of EAPCs here will no longer be required to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, or to wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence. However, in the case of insurance EAPC owners/riders should consider the need for insurance that covers areas such as damage, theft, personal injury and liability when the proposed legislative changes come into force.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she has any plans to bring forward legislation to address dangerous trees along the roadside.

(AQW 1549/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Most roadside trees and hedges are on lands adjacent to public roads. Property owners, or occupiers of those lands, are responsible for ensuring such trees and hedges do not endanger or obstruct road users.

My Department currently has powers under Article 50 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to serve a notice on a landowner or occupier requiring them to remove or cut back any tree or hedge to remove the danger or obstruction. Where an owner or occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, the Department may carry out the necessary works and seek to recover the costs.

As my Department has sufficient powers in place, I have no plans to bring forward any further legislation in this respect.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what powers her Department has in relation to trees growing along the roadside on privately owned land.

(AQW 1550/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Most roadside trees and hedges are on lands adjacent to public roads. Property owners, or occupiers of those lands, are responsible for ensuring that such trees and hedges do not endanger or obstruct road users. From time to time, the Department places notices in the local press and in farming journals reminding owners and occupiers of their responsibilities.

Departmental officials usually identify overgrown trees and hedges that endanger or obstruct road users during routine maintenance inspections. Members of the public also report trees and hedges causing concern, to Roads Section Offices. As a first step, when such cases are reported, owners or occupiers are identified and they are requested to co-operate in removing or cutting the trees or hedges. If they do not do so, the Department has powers under Article 50 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to serve a notice on the owner or occupier requiring them to remove or cut back the tree or hedge to remove the danger or obstruction. Where an owner or occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, the Department may carry out the necessary works and seek to recover the costs.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has any responsibility where an accident occurs due to overgrown or fallen trees along the roadside.

(AQW 1551/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department does not have a statutory duty regarding the condition of trees that are on land beside the adopted road network. However, it does have a statutory duty to maintain the public road network, which requires us to ensure that boundary trees or hedges do not overgrow onto the roadway and footway, thereby impeding road users and pedestrians.

If a tree is suspected of being a hazard or if a tree-related accident has occurred, owners / occupiers are identified and are requested to co-operate in removing or cutting the trees or hedges, to address any concerns in relation to public safety. If they do not do so, my Department has powers under Article 50 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to serve a notice on the owner/occupier requiring them to remove or cut back the tree or hedge, so as to remove the danger or obstruction. Where an owner / occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, my Department may carry out the necessary works and seek to recover costs.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to change the rules for MOT exemption for vehicles over forty years old.

(AQW 1571/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a difference as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest (VHIs) are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following interest in this issue from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be introduced here.

This is an issue that I wish to examine carefully, and I will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all planned capital projects for West Tyrone.
(AQW 1578/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I will be assessing the pressures across my department reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. It is too early to comment on planned capital projects in West Tyrone at this stage.

There are capital schemes under way such as

- Roads: the A5 and planned traffic safety measures across West Tyrone;
- Public Transport: Translink will carry out a programme of works to upgrade safety at Ulsterbus and Metro bus stations. Omagh bus station is included in the programme.
- NI Water: the area will avail of the Capital Maintenance schemes through which NI Water will maintain its asset base such as Base Maintenance Programmes for Wastewater and Water Treatment Works; and Sewerage and Water Pumping Stations as well as Watermains and Sewer Rehabilitation schemes.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans her Department has to resurface (i) Silverstream Drive; (ii) Silverstream Gardens; (iii) Silverstream Park; (iv) Silverstream Crescent; and (v) Silverstream Road, Bangor.
(AQW 1618/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Silverstream Drive, Silverstream Gardens, Silverstream Park or Silverstream Road, Bangor. As with all public roads, the condition of these roads will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and they may be included in future works programmes. In the meantime any recordable defects will be noted and actioned for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have raised the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to maintain our roads to a better standard and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I will consider my options following confirmation of the next budget.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the allocation of £500m in Great Britain to reopen railway lines abandoned in the Beeching closures, what investigations she is making regarding (i) funding; and (b) railway infrastructure.
(AQW 1676/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) I am currently engaging with the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues on the budget process for next year and any changes that will take account of additional monies via the Barnett consequential for the NI Block will not be known until the outcome of this process. This is likely to be March 2020
- (ii) Our rail network, whilst relatively small, presents a unique opportunity to improve the sustainability of our transport network. My Department is currently developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTNTP) which will set out my priorities for future development of the main road and rail networks to 2035. I expect to publish the Draft RSTNTP for consultation later this year.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will bring the law on MOT exemption for vehicles over 40 years old into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.
(AQW 1685/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a disparity as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest (VHIs) are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following lobbying from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be introduced here.

This is an issue that I wish to examine carefully, and I will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure why her Department could not allow MOT Centres to conduct partial tests, an approach taken by NCT centres, following the suspension of vehicle lift use.
(AQW 1745/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The minimum standards for periodic roadworthiness testing are set out in Directive 2014/45/EU of the European Parliament which have been transposed into Northern Ireland legislation.

The Directive stipulates the method for conducting tests, citing the need for an underbody inspection, and does not provide for partial tests. Rather than omit part of the test, The Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides me with the powers to issue Certificates of Temporary Exemption, under Regulation, for the whole test, which I have done for the majority of customers. A Certificate of Temporary Exemption allows customers to tax their vehicle and stay on the road.

In addition, testing is being prioritised for four year old cars, taxis and car dealerships, for which a Certificate of Temporary Exemption is not possible.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the total amount held in DVA reserves.

(AQW 1857/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Driver & Vehicle Agency operates as a Trading Fund under the provisions of the Driver & Vehicle Testing Agency Trading Fund Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 as amended by the Driver and Vehicle Agency Trading Fund Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

The Trading Fund is permitted under the Financial Provisions (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to establish and maintain reserves. Reserves are held to finance current operating requirements and future capital investment.

Cash reserves at 31 March 2019 amounted to £36.9m.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure, where it is proven that an incorrect historical planning decision has adversely affected an individual's rights, under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, whether she will take action to rectify the issue when (i) the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman has ruled in favour of a claimant, even if the Ombudsman has awarded financial reparations; and (ii) it is proven that these reparations do not cover the cost of rectifying the initial planning decision.

(AQW 1867/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department engages fully with any investigations undertaken by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and will implement recommendations made by the Ombudsman in his final reports. This includes, in some cases, a financial payment to the complainant as recommended by the Ombudsman taking account of all aspects of the case investigated.

It is a matter for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman to determine the level of compensation to a complainant following their investigation into a complaint.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail her Department's actions to improve safety at the junction at Bellspark Road and Orchard Road, Strabane.

(AQW 1879/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has plans to progress a scheme to improve the Bellspark Road / Orchard Road junction, which will involve changes to the existing layout making it safer for users. The new layout will introduce a staggered cross roads and remove obstructions to both forward visibility and the junction visibility splays.

I have inherited severe budget constraints, and therefore at this stage, I am unable to confirm a timescale for the delivery of this scheme.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the conditions under which road users can continue driving despite collecting over twelve penalty points.

(AQW 1954/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Continued driving in these circumstances is at the discretion of the judiciary.

Article 40 of the Road Traffic Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 provides for driver disqualification in circumstances where a person has accumulated 12 or more penalty points. The Order stipulates the minimum period of disqualification, which varies according to the person's previous driving record. However, the Order also provides that if a court feels that there are mitigating circumstances, it may order the person to be disqualified for a shorter period – or waive disqualification.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how funding levels are determined for allocation to individual Rural Community Transport Partnerships through the Rural Transport Fund.

(AQW 1961/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department provided £2.4 million funding across 8 Community Transport Partnerships in 2019/20. The basis for this funding allocation was established in 2015/16 when my Departments budgets were significantly reduced and cuts had to be made across the Department. At that time account was taken of the requirements set out by each of the Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP) in their Business Plans, their financial position (specifically the scale of their financial reserves) and the costs incurred by each partnership. This give rise to a specific percentage of the Rural Transport Fund being allocated to each partnership. The 2019/20 baseline allocations for each RCTP is set out in the table below.

RCTPs	Baseline Allocation 2019/20	% of overall Funding Allocation
CDM	£406,899.89	18.2
DCT	£297,120.15	13.3
Easilink	£306,723.34	13.7
FCT	£321,979.69	14.4
LVRT	£115,330.46	5.2
NCCT	£384,894.07	17.2
SACT	£117,871.49	5.3
Southern Area Partnership	£285,261.61	12.8
Total	£2,236,080.70*	100

* CDM, Easilink and NCCT each received additional payments of £3,150, £67,500 and £82,500 respectively which increased RTF spend to £2.4 million in 2019/20

I clearly recognise the important contribution that rural community transport schemes make towards delivering Programme for Government ambitions and connecting some of the most vulnerable people and rural communities, therefore I am committed to finding solutions to protect and maintain rural community transport services. However, we all need to recognise that the benefits of community transport go well beyond my Department, illustrated by the fact that health-related trips currently account for one quarter of all community transport journeys. At a time of constrained budgets, delivering my ambitions for community transport will require innovation, greater collaboration and cross-departmental working.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) what information is being provided to those who have paid for and booked a date for their MOT and are not in the priority group; and (ii) will she provide a contact number for those not in the priority group.

(AQW 2037/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The information provided to customers who have booked a date for their MOT and are not in one of the priority groups has been tailored to the different groups of customers. Owners of vehicles including motorcycles, buses, heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and re-tests are advised to turn up for scheduled appointments, as these tests remain unaffected. Owners of cars five years old or older and light goods vehicles with recently expired or about to expire MOTs are being advised not to attend for test, unless contacted by the DVA to do so. Owners of these vehicles are also advised that they will be automatically issued with a Temporary Exemption Certificate, exempting them from the legal requirement to hold an MOT certificate up to the new date on the exemption certificate. All customers are being urged to continue to book their vehicles for MOT, as only then can the DVA prioritise their appointments, or issue them with a Temporary Exemption Certificate.

A dedicated helpline for customers in the priority group has been set up. The helpline number is 0300 200 7862. For customers not in the priority group as well as updates on press statements and social media, the DVA has created a dedicated section on the NI Direct website, where regular updates are made, to provide customers with one single point of information if they have any queries on this matter this can be accessed via www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/ongoing-issues-mot-test-centres.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on (i) extent and nature of recent attacks upon the Translink network; and (ii) whether any data has been compromised.[R]

(AQW 2164/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (1) Translink has made me aware of difficulties it is experiencing with its internal IT systems. I am receiving regular updates and the incident has been reported to the PSNI. While Translink are working to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, bus and train services have not been affected. Translink's website and journey planner are also not affected.
- (2) Investigations are ongoing, however, there is no evidence that any data has been compromised

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of (i) Just Park parking sessions to date; (ii) Just Park parking sessions invoiced incorrectly to date, as a result of the Just Park app problems; and (iii) Penalty Charge Notices issued in error to date as a result of the Just Park app problems.

(AQW 2229/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There have been 156,000 JustPark parking sessions to date. Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued in error and number of invoices invoiced incorrectly, because of problems with the JustPark app, remains unchanged from my reply to you on 3rd February 2020 in AQW 1136/17-22.

Department of Justice

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to outline when legislation will be brought forward to strengthen the criminal law on child sexual exploitation.

(AQW 1361/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): I expect to publish shortly a report on the summary of responses to the consultation on the Review of the Law on Child Sexual Exploitation. Details of next steps, including proposals for legislative change, will form part of the Report.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Justice how many staff in her Department are on temporary promotion.

(AQW 1365/17-22)

Mrs Long: There are currently 231 staff on temporary promotion in DoJ.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Justice (i) what processes are in place to register interests of senior civil servants; and (ii) whether those processes require any declaration of interest when employing or promoting a family member.

(AQW 1367/17-22)

Mrs Long:

- (i) All senior civil servants in DoJ are asked on an annual basis to complete a declaration and register of interests form. This outlines any directorships, positions or interests they have in any private, public or voluntary body.
- (ii) The NICS Recruitment policy and procedures manual outlines the need for panel members participating in any competition to declare any conflict of interest when interviewing candidates in any selection process and to ensure additional information about any candidate is not shared with other panel members during any part of the process.

All panel members are required to complete recruitment and selection training before taking part in any competition. This training is refreshed when required.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Justice what systems are in place in her Department and departmental agencies to ensure that procedures and processes for the temporary promotion of civil servants are fair and transparent.

(AQW 1368/17-22)

Mrs Long: The NICS policy on Career Opportunities and progression provides guidance on the selection of staff for temporary promotion opportunities. These guidelines cover a range of circumstances in which a temporary promotion might be required and how the selection of an appropriate person should be approached in order to ensure equality of opportunity and transparency.

Managers in the Department can also obtain guidance on all staff resourcing matters including temporary promotion from NICS HR colleagues in DOF.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the Policing Board's process for discharging its responsibility in respect of the appointment of the Deputy Chief Constable.

(AQW 1462/17-22)

Mrs Long: Before I was informed of the Northern Ireland Policing Board's preferred candidate, I received a written briefing from the Board on the recruitment process and subsequently met with the external advisors appointed by the Board, to assist with the quality assurance process. Based on the assurances I received from the Board on the robustness of that process, I was content to approve the Board's recommendation.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of (i) the appointment of temporary High Court Judges on a fee-paying basis, dependant on cases allocated; and (ii) how any conflict of interests, perceived or otherwise, will be managed.

(AQW 1463/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department of Justice is not responsible for the selection or appointment of temporary High Court Judges. However, it approved the appointment of the additional temporary High Court Judges under section 7(3) of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 as a temporary measure in order to facilitate the disposal of business in the High Court or Crown Court. All temporary High Court Judges are fee paid on a daily basis.

Managing any judicial conflict of interest is a matter for the Judge concerned in accordance with arrangements made by the Lord Chief Justice.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department plans to introduce unexplained wealth orders to address paramilitary crime.

(AQW 1489/17-22)

Mrs Long: One of my key priorities is the commencement in Northern Ireland of all outstanding provisions under the Criminal Finances Act 2017, including measures relating to unexplained wealth orders. These powers will reinforce the ability of specified law enforcement agencies to recover the proceeds of crime and tackle money laundering.

Subject to the legislative consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly, which must first be granted, I have asked my officials to take forward the necessary work to support commencement of the outstanding provisions under this Act. This will involve a complex programme of work, covering the production of Codes of Practice, Court Rules and secondary legislation, some of which will need to be made at Westminster. My officials are working with their counterparts in the Home Office to deliver these. Subject to Home Office timescales I am hopeful that these powers will be available for law enforcement within Northern Ireland in October of this year.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to detail the support available to young people about to leave Hydebank Wood, in order to help them cope outside on their own.

(AQW 1506/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) recognises that a key element of any sentence must be the focus on enabling offenders to reform and to desist from future offending behaviour. To that end NIPS works with a number of statutory and voluntary and community sector partners, to prepare young people for release from Hydebank Wood College and to prepare them for resettlement in the community. Activity focusses on nine resettlement pathways and a comprehensive list of the programmes available to Hydebank Wood College students under these pathways is as follows:

PATHWAY 1 – Accommodation

- Housing Rights Service (beyond the gate element)
- 'Make The Call' Welfare Advice – Benefits (beyond the gate element)
- Extern Floating Support Project (custody/community link)
- Referral to hostel panel (Multi-disciplinary team)
- MACS (accommodation support for under 25s linked to custody)
- ASPIRE (mentoring scheme through Probation Board NI/Niacro 6 months post custody).

PATHWAY 2 – Education, Training and Employment

- Belfast Met provides a broad learning and skills curriculum covering essential skills, vocational training and employability
- Belfast Met's accredited employability courses are offered to all young people in Hydebank Wood 12 weeks pre-release
- NIACRO Working Well (employability programme for Women)
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
- Princes Trust Employability Programme
- Advantage Foundation (Quest) Employment Programme - Mugshots
- 'Turnaround' project working out whilst in custody
- ASPIRE (mentoring assistance with employment)
- Basic cooking skills Healthy living programme 6-8 weeks
- Start 360 futures programme

PATHWAY 3 – Health, Mental and Physical

- Acupuncture
- Art Therapy
- Samaritan's Listener Scheme Support
- Cruse Bereavement Care
- Action mental health referral process
- Healthcare referrals
- Voice of release Choir
- Community sports programmes Ulster GAA and IFA

PATHWAY 4 – Drugs and Alcohol

- AD:EPT (comprehensive drug and alcohol service)
- Alcohol Management (Alcoholics Anonymous)
- Alcohol Related Violence Programme
- Basic Substance Awareness Programme
- Drug Education Awareness Programme
- Combined Substance Programme
- Core Harm Reduction

- Referral to outside support agencies

PATHWAY 5 - Finance, Benefit and Debt

- 'Make the Call' Welfare Advice, Department for Communities
- NIACRO FAM (Family and Money Matters/debt advice)

PATHWAY 6 - Children, Families and Communities

- Barnardo's Parenting Matters Being a Dad
- Barnardo's Partners Together
- Barnardo's Parents on release
- Barnardo's Talking to Children about Tough Issues
- Barnardo's Parenting
- Barnardo's Staying in Touch
- NIACRO – Family Links service
- Prison Fellowship NI – Supporting Families
- The Big Book Share

PATHWAY 7 – Attitudes, Thinking and behaviours

- Motivational Enhancement Group (MEG)
- Gaining Opportunities & Living Skills (GOALS)
- Gaining Opportunities & Living Skills (GOALS) Support
- Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage it (CALM)
- Alcohol Related Violence Programme (ARV)
- Cognitive Self-Change Programme
- Enhanced thinking Skills (ETS)
- Enhanced thinking Skills Booster Programme (ETS Booster)
- Think First
- Safer Lives (for young offenders)
- Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Programme
- Probation Board NI - one to one work
- Victim impact programme
- Resolve offending behaviour for adult males

PATHWAY 8 - Supporting offenders who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence

- Nexus counselling.
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Women's Aid

PATHWAY 9 - Supporting offenders who have been involved in prostitution

- Nexus counselling.
- Women's Aid

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice who, from her Department, will represent the interests of victims in the upcoming formulation of a new mental health strategy, as required by December 2020.

(AQW 1569/17-22)

Mrs Long: As a cross cutting strategy on such an important topic my Department has a keen interest in its progression and will engage fully with colleagues in Health as they take this forward.

I will of course want to ensure that relevant justice related matters are represented as appropriate, including issues related to how victims experience the system. There will be Department-wide engagement given the cross-cutting nature of mental health and justice. This will include officials from a range of Directorates (including Reducing Offending and Community Safety) as well as Victim Support NI and at Ministerial level where appropriate. Victim Support NI also support victims and witnesses of crime through the provision of information, practical assistance, advocacy and emotional support.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice why her Department will not consider (i) the introduction of a Victim's Commissioner for victims of crime, including those bereaved through murder; and (ii) whether she has taken advice in respect to equality legislation, where a Victims and Survivors Commissioner has been introduced for those affected by troubles related crime.

(AQW 1570/17-22)

Mrs Long: While the introduction of a Victim's Commissioner is not being proposed by my Department at this time, no final decision has been taken. Although there is no specific provision for the statutory duties and functions of a Victim's Commissioner, the interests and needs of victims are represented by my Department and independently by Victim Support NI. I will be meeting with bereaved families to take their views on what the benefits and purpose of a Victims' Commissioner for victims of crime would be, how this is not currently being met and how any gaps identified could be filled. I have not taken advice in respect of equality legislation. The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 makes specific and separate provision for a Commission for Victims and Survivors with the principal aim of promoting the interests of victims and survivors of conflict related incidents and is the responsibility of the Executive Office.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the challenges of cross-border policing following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

(AQW 1577/17-22)

Mrs Long: Cross-border police co-operation is good and facilitated, in part, by cross-border policing agreements with Ireland and joint task force working, all of which will continue following the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Cross-border co-operation is further enhanced by around forty EU justice measures. The UK will continue to have access to these measures during the transition period up to the end of 2020. These include operational measures such as: the European Arrest Warrant; access to IT systems on matters such as wanted and missing persons, criminal records and DNA profiles; and membership of EU agencies such as Europol and Eurojust.

Loss of these key EU measures will directly impact on the justice system in NI and although there are contingency plans in place, these are sub-optimal. Continued access to the EU measures will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the UK and the EU on a Future Security Partnership. A data adequacy agreement with the UK to allow the continued flow of data is also essential. I support a comprehensive, close and balanced partnership with the EU, to facilitate reciprocal-co-operation in criminal matters and my officials are engaged with the Home Office to ensure that Northern Ireland priorities, including continued cross-border cooperation, are taken into account during the negotiation process.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how much the Lisnevin site was sold for.

(AQW 1615/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Lisnevin site formed part of the former Prison Service College at Millisle. Prior to its disposal Land and Property Services in conjunction with their appointed estate agents Lambert Smith Hampton valued the site with a guide price of £1.75 million.

The saleability and value of the site was limited by the nature of the Grade B2 listed building Woburn House which offers challenges for any potential purchaser. The site received a strong level of interest with 65 registered viewings. The sale process was concluded on 4th July 2018 through 'Best and Final Offers' which was successful in increasing the previous highest bid by a further £217,000 to £1,527,000 (One Million, Five Hundred and Twenty Seven thousand pounds).

On the basis that the market had been fully and extensively tested the District Valuer from Land & Property Services recommended acceptance of the highest offer.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice who in her Department authorised the sale of the former Lisnevin Prison Service site.

(AQW 1616/17-22)

Mrs Long: Following a full and extensive testing of the market, the District Valuer from Land & Property Services recommended acceptance of the highest offer. The recommendation was subsequently accepted by the then Permanent Secretary of the Department of Justice who approved the sale.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail all the land valuations that were undertaken, prior to the sale of the former Lisnevin Prison Service site.

(AQW 1617/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Lisnevin site formed part of the former Prison Service College at Millisle. During the period 2010-2017 two market valuations were prepared by Land & Property Services (LPS) and a separate valuation was also prepared in 2015 by estate agents acting on behalf of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB).

LPS supplied an initial market valuation in January 2010 of £3,790,000 which included caveats advising that it was subject to downward revision whenever the abnormal costs of asbestos removal and the arrangements for waste water treatment were more fully understood.

A valuation was produced on behalf of SIB in June 2015 by Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) indicating the lands would be capable of achieving in the region of £1,700,000. Immediately prior to its release onto the open market in January 2018 LPS and LSH valued the site with a suggested guide price of £1,750,000.

The saleability and value of the site was limited by the nature of the Grade B2 listed building Woburn House which offers challenges for any potential purchaser. The site received a strong level of interest with 65 registered viewings. The sale process was concluded on 4 July 2018 and the site was sold for £1,527,000.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice whether she will appoint independent members via the public appointment process to the Family Justice Board.

(AQW 1625/17-22)

Mrs Long: I will be considering the recommendation of the Family Justice Review for the establishment of a Family Justice Board. However, before reaching a decision on this and any related appointment process, I will need to take time to give detailed consideration to all of the many and wide-ranging proposals, which come within my Department's remit, including discussing cross-cutting implications with other Departments.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice whether she will ensure that public legal aid, in public and private law family court cases, is scrutinised to ensure it is not inappropriately or inadvertently processed for private law aspects.

(AQW 1626/17-22)

Mrs Long: Where legal aid is in place for representation in proceedings before the Family Courts, the certificate will prescribe the level of representation and the scope of the proceedings which is covered by the certificate.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, each legal representative, acting on behalf of an individual in receipt of legal aid, will submit a bill in respect of the work undertaken against each legal aid certificate. The claim should only include work undertaken on foot of a legal aid certificate. Claims will set out the work undertaken in respect of each case and should be supported by court orders.

The assessor will scrutinise each bill submitted to ensure that the work claimed is in accordance with the terms of the legal aid certificate.

In family cases, where there are linked proceedings, the assessment process will include a check of other legal aid certificates that may be in place. In specific circumstances there are procedures for remunerating practitioners who are acting for the same client in more than one case which are running concurrently with the benefit of legal aid. The claim for fees will be assessed to ensure that work claimed is fair and reasonable in the context of the court proceedings.

If the review of the claim, gives rise for concern in that it is not clear why specific items of work were undertaken or they would appear to fall outside the scope of the legal aid certificate these would be disallowed or queries raised.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice whether she will fully implement the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee and Northern Ireland Audit Office in respect of the Legal Services Agency, to ensure that public legal aid, presently adjudicated by the Taxing Master, is properly brought under the purview of the Accounting Officer.

(AQW 1627/17-22)

Mrs Long: My Department is currently scoping a review into how all expenditure currently adjudicated by the Taxing Master in first instance can be properly brought under the purview of the Accounting Officer. Delivering change in this area will be complex and is likely to involve amending primary legislation. This will take some time, however it is essential to ensure that the Department has the necessary oversight and control over this expenditure and that we are achieving and demonstrating value for money.

In the interim, the Department has been scoping two remuneration reform projects which would, in shorter time, replace adjudication by the Taxing Master in first instance with standard fees in two key areas: the most common family law cases and criminal appeals at the Court of Appeal.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice whether she will implement the recommendations of the Review of Civil and Family Justice in Northern Ireland and appoint, via public appointment process, an independent chairperson to the Family Justice Board.

(AQW 1628/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Review on Civil and Family Justice made a significant number of wide ranging recommendations. Many fall outside the remit of the Department of Justice or would have significant financial, operational or cross-cutting implications. Before reaching decisions I will need to take time to consider proposals in detail and discuss implications with other Departments. That includes recommendations in relation to the Family Justice Board and any related appointment process.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Justice how and when the Ulster University became accredited to deliver policing training to PSNI recruits.

(AQW 1638/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the training of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your questions to the PSNI.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) when the contract to train PSNI officers was awarded to the Ulster University; and (ii) whether the contract went out to tender.

(AQW 1641/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the training of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your questions to the PSNI.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Justice whether the policing course at the Ulster University is affiliated to or accredited by the College of Policing in England.

(AQW 1642/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the training of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your questions to the PSNI.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many staff car parking spaces her Department and its agencies have in Belfast city centre; and whether she is taking any action to reduce this number.

(AQW 1647/17-22)

Mrs Long: There are 410 car parking spaces available to staff in Belfast City Centre. These are provided by the following bodies: Probation Board NI; Youth Justice Agency; NI Policing Board; NI Courts & Tribunals Service (including Planning Appeals Commission & Water Appeals Commission); Legal Services Agency NI; Office of the Police Ombudsman NI; and Compensation Services.

It is the responsibility of each body to keep its car parking provision under review against its individual business needs.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the recently published Northern Ireland Civil Service People Survey, particularly the responses regarding her Department.

(AQW 1648/17-22)

Mrs Long: The annual Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Survey is a valuable tool to help understand how people feel about working in the NICS.

It provides evidence about how we are doing in areas such as Leadership, Inclusion and Learning and Development and enables us to establish where we can do better.

Work has been ongoing since 2017 through the DoJ Staff Engagement Forum and People Plan to increase engagement, understand the results and ensure the right actions and initiatives are put in place to address the issues identified. It will take some time for this work to embed.

The senior management team in the Department will now be working with staff to understand the most recent results, build on what has been achieved to date, amend based on what we have learned to date and assess what more needs to be done.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the percentage of staff within her Department who said they had personally experienced discrimination in the past twelve months.

(AQW 1649/17-22)

Mrs Long: According to the 2019 Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Survey, 19% of staff in the Department of Justice (DoJ) have personally experienced discrimination at work. Discrimination of any kind is not acceptable in the workplace.

This figure is much higher than the overall NICS figure of 12% and it is a priority area that needs to be addressed. Work is ongoing to look at the breakdown of this figure and understand where it is happening, the reasons for reporting it and ensure the right measures are in place.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice what health and wellbeing support is available to staff who have experienced discrimination within her Department.

(AQW 1650/17-22)

Mrs Long: In response to the 2017 People Survey results in 2018 the Department of Justice (DoJ) refreshed the role of 'Harassment Contact Officer' and re-trained 25 staff across the Department to act as a 'first point of contact and support' for staff who were experiencing harassment, bullying or discrimination in the workplace. A Contact Officer is available in each business area and their role is promoted via the staff intranet.

Other support is available through The Department of Finance (DoF) NICS HR which has policy responsibility for Employee Relations. This includes:

- The NICS Mediation Service. A pragmatic approach to dealing with conflict in the workplace that offers an alternative to the formal grievance procedures.
- The Welfare Support Service (WSS) an independent and confidential service to all staff.
- The Employee Assistance Programme, provided by Inspire.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice how her Department is addressing crimes involving scam callers in rural areas. (AQW 1663/17-22)

Mrs Long: Scams are an issue affecting all parts of Northern Ireland and every community. Scammers tend to target their efforts towards specific groups as opposed to specific locations, especially when the scam is cyber enabled or telephone based with many originating outside of the United Kingdom.

The Department of Justice is a member of the Scamwise NI Partnership which brings together over thirty members from a wide range of sectors in Northern Ireland including faith, housing, banking, retail, charitable, youth, statutory and law enforcement, to raise awareness of scams and how to prevent them. The Partnership has developed a recognised brand and logo – ‘If you can spot a scam you can stop a scam’ – and Facebook page which raises awareness of scams in Northern Ireland including how to deal with scam callers, both in person and on the telephone.

In addition to a strong social media presence, the Partnership has excellent links with local print, radio and television outlets which regularly feature ScamwiseNI stories. Alongside the year-long advertising campaigns paid for by Assets Recovery funding, the Partnership has developed a number of initiatives. For example, the six uniformed youth organisations in Northern Ireland and the non-uniformed youth sector have developed a resource with the Partnership, “Scamwise Champion”, which takes young people through a course on scam awareness; our local retailers have recently delivered ScamwiseNI advice to their customers via home deliveries; and the Post Office “Ask Us” scheme was launched where Post Office staff act as advisers to customers about scams and frauds.

Along with the Northern Ireland Policing Board, my Department also funds Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) to work with the community to identify issues of concern in a local area and to prepare plans to deliver practical solutions to address these. PCSPs working within rural regions are taking forward a wide range of initiatives to ensure callers to domestic or business premises are legitimate, for example Farm Watch, No Cold Calling and Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department’s arm’s-length bodies, that provide frontline services, receive autism training. (AQW 1664/17-22)

Mrs Long: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) e-learning package is available for all staff in the Department of Justice (DoJ) to access as required.

In 2019, the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) launched Just a Minute (JAM) card training for all staff, in particular those in front facing roles. DoJ has promoted this training throughout the Department, its Agencies and NDPB’s and has achieved over 60% completion to become ‘Jam friendly’.

Some business areas have developed or delivered further autism training for frontline staff where required as detailed below:

- The Probation Board Northern Ireland (PBNI) offer autism training to their staff annually through four trained trainers who develop in-house autism awareness training.
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has delivered training within the Police College to student officers. Community engagement evenings are held for student officers during the training programme, with awareness sessions provided by advocacy groups. Autism awareness is also provided to Custody Officers and Detention Officers during their training.
- All Public Prosecution Service (PPS) staff have undergone NICS Centre of Applied Learning (CAL) training on autism and Prosecutors have received training from Autism NI.
- The Youth Justice Agency (YJA) trained all operational staff to Level 2 awareness in 2017/18. This was delivered by Autism NI.
- The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) have ten staff and trainers accredited to deliver autism training to new recruits as part of their induction programme. They plan to deliver further awareness training to Prisoner Escort staff in 2020.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice what discussions she had with the Home Office in respect to the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill; and whether she will ask for Northern Ireland be included in this bill. (AQW 1952/17-22)

Mrs Long: My officials held initial discussions with Northern Ireland Office and Ministry of Justice colleagues to assess the implications for Northern Ireland. However, this is a reserved matter, and the decision not to extend the provisions to Northern Ireland was taken in the absence of formal engagement by the Ministry of Justice with the Department.

I want to ensure the most appropriate legislation is brought forward in Northern Ireland and welcome the Justice Secretary’s comments in the House of Commons on 12 February regarding new Counter Terrorism legislation and opportunities to analyse longer-term proposals. This should provide an opportunity to examine how the emergency provisions could be extended to Northern Ireland and I will be writing to the Justice Secretary to confirm I have asked officials to meet with his team on this matter.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Justice how her Department is addressing paramilitarism and organised crime.

(AQO 127/17-22)

Mrs Long: Our Ministerial Pledge commits us to working collectively to achieve a society free of paramilitarism and to challenge all paramilitary activity and associated criminality.

The Executive Action Plan, which is co-ordinated within my Department, takes a holistic approach to tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. It includes 38 commitments aimed at preventing people from becoming vulnerable to paramilitary influence, providing support to enable transition away from paramilitary structures, building confidence in the justice system, and implementing new powers and strategies to deal with paramilitary activity.

Ending the harm caused by paramilitarism cannot be the sole responsibility of the criminal justice system. We are working in partnership across the Executive to address the systemic issues that build strong, resilient communities where there is no place for paramilitary organisations and activity.

Through the Executive Action Plan, and more widely, my Department has made a number of commitments, including: measures to speed up justice and new powers to tackle organised crime; developing a centre of excellence for restorative justice; working with Policing and Community Safety Partnerships to embed a culture of lawfulness; delivering a public awareness campaign on paramilitary style attacks; and implementing assets recovery arrangements. The Department also works closely with the PSNI, which has established the Paramilitary Crime Task Force and is delivering local interventions and problem solving initiatives with the community.

More widely, my Department is working to respond to the threats posed by organised crime. This includes the work of the Organised Crime Task Force to provide a strategic response to organised crime threats. I have also prioritised the full implementation of the Criminal Finances Act in Northern Ireland, and I intend to consult on legislative proposals for new offences to tackle organised crime.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice to outline her plans for a pilot of a Mental Health Court.

(AQO 132/17-22)

Mrs Long: Problem Solving Justice is a new approach in Northern Ireland aimed at tackling the root causes of offending behaviour, reducing harm and addressing vulnerabilities within families and the community.

The Department, in partnership with other government departments, agencies and the voluntary and community sector, has developed a portfolio of Problem Solving Justice projects which are at various stages of development.

A Project Board has been established and plans for the development of a Mental Health Court are due to be scoped this year, in conjunction with other stakeholders including the Department of Health.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Justice how she will ensure the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is resourced adequately to allow the backlog of historical investigations to be cleared.

(AQO 130/17-22)

Mrs Long: Legacy continues to put pressures on the justice system, which it is not resourced to meet. The best way to address the backlog of historical investigations is through the establishment of the Stormont House Agreement institutions, supported with adequate funding.

I am committed to working with my Executive Colleagues in securing adequate resources for the establishment of the Historical Investigation Unit, which will undertake outstanding historical investigations. In the interim, funding for OPONI will continue to be considered as part of the normal budget process.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister of Justice to outline what actions her Department has taken to ensure the UK Government's White Paper on Online Harm meets the needs of people in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 131/17-22)

Mrs Long: The UK Government's White Paper seeks to address a wide range of online harms including child sexual exploitation and abuse, terrorist content or activity, organised immigration crime, modern slavery, extreme and revenge pornography, harassment, cyber-stalking and hate crime; as well as harms that are less clearly defined, like cyberbullying and trolling, coercive behaviour, intimidation, disinformation and advocacy of self harm.

Telecommunications is a reserved matter and so implementation falls predominantly to UK Government Departments. However many of these harms relate to devolved matters. As such, my officials engaged fully to inform the UK Government's response and to ensure that the best interests of people in Northern Ireland are fully met.

DOJ collaborated with Home Office and DCMS to host a series of workshops with relevant NI Departments, law enforcement and with civil society and industry stakeholders in this jurisdiction.

The UK Government published its response to the consultation on the White Paper last week and intends to bring forward legislation to protect children and vulnerable adults from digital threats as well as the development of a government media literacy strategy. My Department will continue to engage with the UK Government and other relevant Executive Departments as work on these issues progresses.

These new measures will complement the existing work of DOJ, PSNI, the Organised Crime Task Force and other partners to keep people safe from cybercrime and cyber enabled crime. This includes empowering people to be safer through partnerships such as Get Safe Online.

In addition, the scope of the independent Judge-led review of hate crime legislation has been extended to include consideration of online hate crime and abuse. The intention is that the review's work will not duplicate any of the issues covered by the White Paper but will assist in contributing to further debate on this issue.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the Gillen Review.

(AQO 133/17-22)

Mrs Long: Implementation of the Gillen Review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences is included in New Decade, New Approach and is a key priority for my Department in the year ahead.

The Department is working with multi-agency partners to develop a phased implementation plan for the current mandate and beyond. The Criminal Justice Board has agreed that recommendations which will have the greatest impact on complainants going through the system should be prioritised. The detailed implementation plan, highlighting relevant dates and deliverables will be presented to the Criminal Justice Board at its next meeting and we will share this with the Justice Committee once available.

This is a complex and important piece of work, which requires engagement beyond the criminal justice system and I am determined that significant progress is made within the current mandate.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service plans to sell any of its surplus land assets on the open market.

(AQO 129/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has no surplus land assets.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Justice to outline her plans regarding the further roll out of the Mental Health Multi Agency Triage Team (MATT).

(AQO 134/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Multi Agency Triage Team, also known as "MATT", has been developed on a collaborative basis between a number of stakeholders across the health and justice sectors. The project is currently operating within the South Eastern and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on Friday and Saturday nights.

The MATT involves two police officers, a mental health practitioner and a paramedic working together to respond to individuals aged 18 and over with mental health issues, who have been identified as in need of its support.

An evaluation of the current project is due to be complete by March 2020, with a view to assessing its suitability for further roll out. Naturally, those departments and agencies involved will want to consider carefully the outcome of the evaluation before determining the future of this pilot.

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review into the care of vulnerable people in prison.

(AQO 135/17-22)

Mrs Long: Both the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the South Eastern Trust have undertaken significant work to keep those who are placed in custody safe.

A joint Suicide and Self-Harm Risk Management Strategy and a joint Management of Substance Misuse Strategy are now in place and a new approach to supporting people at risk of Suicide and Self-harm has been introduced. This work has led to an 18% reduction in instances of self-harm across the Prison Service and a 53% reduction among the young men at Hydebank Wood Secure College.

Both organisations have also adopted the towards zero suicide approach and a psychiatrist specialising in mental health and addictions issues has been appointed at Maghaberry Prison.

However, it is the case that three years after my predecessor and the then Health Minister commissioned the review the work has still not been completed.

Initial work was undertaken by the two Departments but was stalled when it was concluded that an independent element was required to ensure credibility. The RQIA have been asked to undertake this review but due to other pressures have been unable to do so.

It is my intention to discuss this matter urgently with the Health Minister with a view to ensuring this work is completed urgently.

Department for the Economy

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for the Economy to confirm if Project Stratum (i) is proceeding, (ii) has sufficient funding; and to detail (i) the timescale for rollout; and (ii) the date households and businesses in each constituency will be able to access improved broadband speeds.

(AQW 465/17-22)

Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy):

- (i) Project Stratum is proceeding and is currently at mid-procurement stage. Project Stratum aims to utilise the £165m funding to improve internet connectivity for premises unable to access speeds of 30 Mbps or greater. I am aware of some commentary on the withdrawal of the Confidence and Supply funding following the New Decade New Approach Agreement. I can confirm that discussions are ongoing on the financial package, including the restoration of the remaining Confidence and Supply funding, and that broadband remains a key priority for the Executive.
- (ii) My Department will seek to maximise the industry contribution, over and above the current £165m public investment, to ensure that as many premises as possible benefit from the project. However, it is anticipated that not all premises within the intervention area will benefit and officials continue to engage with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to explore how such premises will be addressed, as expeditiously as possible, on a national scale and in line with UK Government policy.
- (iii) Contract award is expected in mid-2020. My Department's early engagement with industry indicates that a 6-9 month period is required for network design and delivery preparation. It is not, therefore, anticipated that deployment of infrastructure will commence until January 2021 at the earliest and will be completed by 31 March 2024.
- (iv) The precise number and location of premises that will benefit from Project Stratum, and the likely availability of new services, will not be known until after contract award.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for the Economy what steps her Department has taken to improve the provision of broadband in rural areas.

(AQW 644/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In line with the draft Programme for Government 2016 - 2021, my Department has developed Project Stratum to utilise the £150m broadband funding, together with a further £15m contribution from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to improve internet connectivity for those premises currently unable to access broadband speeds of 30 Mbps or greater, primarily across rural areas of Northern Ireland.

Project Stratum is at mid-procurement stage and, through this process, my Department will seek to maximise broadband coverage across the intervention area through the utilisation of the total £165m public funding, along with an anticipated industry contribution.

My Department published its response to an Open Market Review EU State aid public consultation on 16 December 2019, which confirmed a target intervention area for Project Stratum. Just over 97,000 premises across Northern Ireland were identified as being eligible to benefit under this project, with 90% of the proposed intervention area being defined as rural.

However, new data received recently from two broadband suppliers has resulted in the number of premises within the intervention area being reduced to just under 79,000. An Addendum to the Open Market Review report was published on 5 February 2020. This is a positive development, as the premises removed can already access speeds of 30 Mbps or greater and do not need to wait on the delivery of Project Stratum.

While the number and location of premises that will benefit will not be known until the procurement is complete and a contract has been awarded, expected in mid-2020, the revised target intervention area will allow the funding to go further and supports my Department's objective to maximise the number of premises to benefit from the funding available.

It is anticipated, however, that not all premises within the intervention area will benefit. My Department continues to engage with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to explore how such premises will be addressed, as expeditiously as possible, on a national scale and in line with UK Government policy.

I am aware of some commentary on the withdrawal of the Confidence and Supply funding following the New Decade New Approach Agreement. I can confirm that discussions are ongoing on the financial package and that broadband remains a key priority for the Executive.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy, further to the commitment in Annex D of New Decade, New Approach to close down the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme, what consideration has been given to the outcomes of the litigation in DECC-v-Friends of the Earth and Breyer Group-v-DECC, and with what results.

(AQW 973/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department will have due regard to all relevant legal issues, including case law, in its considerations of how the New Decade, New Approach commitment to closing RHI is delivered.

As legal proceedings in relation to the Northern Ireland RHI Scheme are ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to provide further detail at this point in time.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for the Economy what plans her Department has to standardise accreditation for English language courses for people arriving in Northern Ireland who do not speak English as a first language.

(AQW 1172/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) courses are provided free by Further Education colleges across Northern Ireland to refugees, asylum seekers and those granted humanitarian protection.

The Department has recently commenced the development of an ESOL Policy for Northern Ireland. A key aim in developing this policy will be to consider how best to standardise ESOL provision across Northern Ireland in a number of different aspects, including accredited qualifications.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the timescale for the Energy Strategy, referred to in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQW 1174/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: A Call for Evidence paper was published in December 2019, seeking to gather information and providing opportunity for stakeholder input into the direction of the new strategy. Following analysis of replies, a draft options paper for the Energy Strategy will be published for consultation later in 2020. Once the analysis of the consultation responses has taken place, a draft Energy Strategy will be prepared for Ministerial consideration by the end of 2020 or as soon as possible thereafter. A new Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland is being developed in the context of the UK's legislative target of net zero carbon by 2050. The Department has already undertaken significant work in relation to the development of a new Energy Strategy, engaging with key industry players and other stakeholders.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for the Economy what discussions she proposes to have with the Minister of Health to establish the Open University as a provider of Social Work degrees with registration in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1176/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department provides funding and sets the strategic direction for the higher education sector. However, policy and funding decisions regarding social work degrees fall within the remit of the Department of Health. Any decision regarding establishing the Open University as a provider of social work degrees with registration in Northern Ireland is one for the Health Minister.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy (i) how many audits of RHI boilers have been performed by each of the three companies which successfully tendered for this work; and (ii) how much has each been paid to date.

(AQW 1180/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) Since the award of the contract in June 2018, one company has carried out 369 site visits on behalf of the Department. This equates to c.950 installations on the non-domestic RHI scheme. To date, the two other companies not been contracted to undertake inspections.
- (ii) I can confirm that the Department holds the information requested. However, it is not possible to release this particular information due to the commercially sensitive nature.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy to outline (i) an explanation of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation Buy-Out fund; (ii) what it is designed to do; (iii) how much budget it receives annually; (iv) who administers it; and (v) how it operates.

(AQW 1185/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Licenced electricity suppliers meet their legal obligation to provide evidence that a specified quantity of the electricity they supply to consumers is generated from renewable sources either by presenting Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs), by paying a fee into the UK-wide buy-out fund or a combination of both.

The buy-out fund was designed to ensure that ROCs have a market value and to provide an incentive for suppliers to purchase them. At the end of each obligation period the proceeds from buy-out fees are redistributed from the buy-out fund to suppliers in proportion to the number of ROCs presented to meet their Obligation.

The buy-out fund does not receive a budget. Ofgem administers the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation, along with the other two Renewable Obligations in GB, including the buy-out fund.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for the Economy what funding has been committed by the UK and Irish Governments towards realising 10,000 undergraduate places at the Magee campus, as outlined in New Deal, New Approach.

(AQW 1269/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: No funding has, as yet, been formally committed by the UK or Irish Governments towards increasing undergraduate places at the Magee Campus as outlined in New Decade, New Approach. The Department of Finance remains in discussions with HMT on the UK Government financial package associated with the priorities in New Decade, New Approach.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of foreign direct investment visits hosted by InvestNI, by constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1300/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The table below shows the number of visits by potential inward investors, hosted by Invest NI, to constituency areas in each of the years between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

Parliamentary Constituency	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Belfast East	30	34	43
Belfast North	28	29	40
Belfast South	59	158	181
Belfast West	8	10	14
East Antrim	8	3	8
East Londonderry	1	3	2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	1	3
Foyle	10	6	6
Lagan Valley	2	4	4
Mid Ulster	0	0	1
Newry & Armagh	3	1	1
North Antrim	0	6	3
North Down	0	0	3
South Antrim	3	9	5
South Down	0	0	0
Strangford	0	0	0
Upper Bann	3	1	3
West Tyrone	2	0	2

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the total renewable energy potential of existing renewable infrastructure, such as wind, solar, tidal, in total megawatt hours (MWh); and (ii) this information as a ratio of total electricity demand, displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1335/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The Member is referred to data tables for "Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland October 2018 to September 2019", published on the 5th December 2019, which detail the figures below for the 12 month rolling period ending September 2019.

	Rolling 12 month average (MWh) Oct 2018 – Sep 2019	Renewable Electricity Generated as a percentage of Total Electricity Consumption
Renewable Wind (MWh)	246,790	38.3%
Renewable Other (MWh)	42,816	6.6%
Total Renewable Electricity Generated (MWh)	289,607	44.9%
Total Electricity Consumption (MWh)	644,774	

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy the total revenue raised through the levying of the common gas tariff on consumer gas bills, broken down by year for each of the past ten years, displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1336/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Actual Revenue (£m)	34.8	35.1	40.6	45.4	45.6
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Actual Revenue (£m)	49.2	48.7	45.7	50.3	58.2

Notes:

- (i) Information provided by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.
- (ii) Each Gas Year runs from 1 October to 30 September in the following year.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy (i) for a list of fossil fuel based power stations in the North of Ireland; (ii) the annual megawatt hour (Mwh) of electricity produced by each; and (iii) the share of the electricity grid contributed by each, in each of the past ten years, displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1337/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

(i) Fossil Fuel-based Power Stations in Northern Ireland

Power Station	Capacity in Megawatts
Ballylumford	709
Kilroot	618
Coolkeeragh	461
Aggregated Generation Units	76
Contour Global	12
Total	1,876

(ii) & (iii)

The switch to the new Single Electricity Market in October 2018 means that it has not been possible to provide an answer, in respect of parts (ii) & (iii) of this question, while ensuring the accuracy of the data provided, within the timescale for answering Written Assembly Questions. Parts (ii) & (iii) of the question are being considered by the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) and an answer will be provided to the Member as soon as it is available.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy the average gross charge on a consumer gas bill, in each of the past five years, through the levying of the common gas tariff.

(AQW 1338/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

Firmus Energy ('10 Towns' licence area)

Date of tariff change	Transmission cost per customer
October 2019	£54
October 2018	£57
April 2018	£46
April 2017	£45
April 2016	£46
October 2015	£45
October 2013	£33

SSE Airtricity (Greater Belfast and Larne licence area)

Date of tariff change	Transmission cost per customer
October 2018	£59
April 2018	£50
April 2017	£53
April 2016	£49
October 2015	£51
April 2015	£47

Notes:

- (i) Information provided by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.
- (ii) The above tables show the transmission element (£ / annum) for each of firmus energy's and SSE Airtricity's regulated tariffs over the last five years.
- (iii) This has been calculated using the typical annual consumption for a standard domestic customer of 12,000KWh.

Whilst firmus energy and SSE Airtricity are subject to the same gas transmission tariffs, what individual customers pay is partly determined by how many customers their respective supplier has, as some of the costs have a fixed element.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy the total funds invested in gas infrastructure from revenue raised by the common gas tariff, broken down by year for each of the past 10 years, displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1339/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The common gas transmission tariff collects payment for past investments made by gas companies in the Northern Ireland gas transmission network, rather than raising revenues for future investments. Investments in gas pipelines are recovered from consumers over the useful life of the asset in a strictly regulated process which is overseen by the Utility Regulator. Revenues raised (as set out in the response to related question AQW 1336/17-22) cover the cost for past investments as well as for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the gas transmission network.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy what proposals her Department has to help businesses impacted by Brexit.

(AQW 1372/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Work is at an early stage because the intervention required will depend on the practical detail of the implementation of the Protocol which has not yet been agreed by UK Government and the EU.

I will be pressing UK Government to deliver on its commitments to protect Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market to ensure the impact on businesses trading with GB is minimised. I will also be working alongside my Executive colleagues to ensure that measures to mitigate other impacts are brought forward.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy to provide an update on Project Stratum, to detail (i) when a contract will be awarded; and (ii) when works are expected to commence.

(AQW 1373/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Project Stratum is at the mid-procurement stage, with contract award expected in mid-2020.

My Department will seek to maximise broadband coverage across the intervention area through the utilisation of the total £165m public funding, along with an anticipated industry contribution.

On 16 December 2019, my Department published its response to the Open Market Review EU State aid public consultation. This confirmed a target intervention area of some 97,000 premises. However, new data received recently from two broadband suppliers has resulted in the number of premises within the target intervention area being reduced to just under 79,000. An Addendum to the Open Market Review report was published on 5 February 2020. This is a positive development, as the premises removed can already access speeds of 30 Mbps or greater and do not need to wait on the delivery of Project Stratum.

While the number and location of premises that will benefit will not be known until the procurement is complete and a contract has been awarded, expected in mid-2020, the revised target intervention area will allow the funding to go further and supports my Department's objective to maximise the number of premises to benefit from the funding available.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department made a submission to the review of the Aggregates Levy; and, if so, has this been made available to the public.

(AQW 1374/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The Department of Finance Strategic Policy Division led on the Northern Ireland response to HM Treasury on its review of the Aggregates levy which it issued on 5 July 2019. Officials from my Department worked with the Department of Finance in its preparation of the response. The input from my Department to the discussion has not been published.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department has had any engagement with telecom providers regarding roaming charges post-Brexit.
(AQW 1400/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department has had no direct engagement with telecoms providers regarding roaming charges post-Brexit.

Telecommunications policy, including mobile and roaming, is a reserved matter which is led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in Westminster. DCMS has advised my officials that the four main Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) have indicated that they have no current plans to reintroduce roaming charges post-Brexit.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department has engaged with its counterpart in Westminster concerning roaming charges post-Brexit; and its impact on the border area.
(AQW 1402/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Telecommunications policy, including mobile and roaming charges, is a reserved matter which is led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in Westminster.

My officials have engaged with counterparts in DCMS about the implications of the UK's exit from the EU on Northern Ireland's mobile telecommunications services, including roaming charges in the border area and elsewhere.

DCMS has advised my officials that the four main Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) have indicated that they currently have no plans to reintroduce roaming charges post Brexit.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department has received the Buglass Report into the economic impact arising from the imposition of a rebate tariff resulting from the 2019 legislation; and, if so, will she lay a copy of the report in the Assembly Library.
(AQW 1423/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The work referred to remains ongoing. The Department will communicate its findings when complete.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether she has considered Alternative Dispute Resolution rather than litigation, as a means of resolving the dispute with the Renewable Heat Association and its members.
(AQW 1424/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The various options available to the Department to work towards closure whilst engaging with participants and taking into account the cases already before the courts will be carefully considered.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether (i) it was permissible for a participant in the DETI RHI Scheme to use a grant (or CDEL allocation) from public funds to purchase the biomass boiler for which they have been given accreditation; (ii) if the public monies or grant are an inappropriate source of funding for continuing DETI RHI participation; and (iii) whether the Minister will require the public bodies affected to repay the rebate funds made to date.
(AQW 1425/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- i) Regulation 10(a) of the Domestic RHI Scheme Regulations 2014 permitted the use of a grant from public funds to purchase the accredited installation. Regulation 23 of the Non Domestic RHI Scheme Regulations 2012 required applicants to give notice that no grant from public funds, or other financial advantage, had been provided by a public authority to purchase the installation, unless that support has been repaid. CDEL allocations received by public bodies are not specified as falling within Regulation 23.
- ii) A grant from public money is not an inappropriate source of funding for continuing Domestic RHI scheme participation, but is inappropriate for continuing Non Domestic RHI scheme participation. Public monies in the form of CDEL allocations are not considered to be an inappropriate source of funding for continuing Non Domestic RHI scheme participation.
- iii) Where it is identified that a participant has used an inappropriate source of funding to purchase an accredited installation, my Department will take appropriate enforcement action.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to provide a breakdown of the legal fees incurred by her Department in respect of the RHI Inquiry, showing how much of the costs was attributable to providing representation and legal services in respect of; (i) politicians; (ii) civil servants; and (iii) others and the Department generally.
(AQW 1426/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The legal costs incurred by my Department in respect of the RHI inquiry as at 31 March 2019 is £3.98m. It would not be appropriate to provide any further breakdown at this stage.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total share of renewable energy generated by microgeneration systems.

(AQW 1433/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The most recent 12 month period for which microgeneration data is available is April 2018 to March 2019. During this period an estimated 83.7 GWh of renewable electricity was produced by microgenerators in Northern Ireland.

Over the same period, total renewable electricity generation as sourced from NIE and SONI is 3,352.3 GWh. Therefore, microgeneration was equivalent to 2.5% of the total renewable generation volume.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy what plans she has to develop a comprehensive Green New Deal economic strategy, as proposed in New Decade, New Approach, in order to achieve IPCC determined carbon emission reduction targets.

(AQW 1435/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA), sets out a number of proposed strategic priorities to be agreed by the Executive for inclusion within the Programme for Government.

The call for the Economic Strategy to support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal sits within the context of the need for a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the challenge of climate change within the Programme for Government.

In line with the NDNA, my Department is committed to leading on the development of an Economic Strategy that sets out the Executive's economic priorities and supports a new Programme for Government.

Responding to the challenge of climate change is a complex policy area and development of a Green New Deal within that context will require input from across a number of Departments. My Executive colleagues and I will need to work collectively to determine the next steps required to take this work forward.

My own Department is currently progressing work that will contribute towards this area including the development of a policy framework for the Circular Economy.

My Department is also committed to achieving the UK Government's legislated target of net-zero carbon by 2050. A new Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland will set out targets and actions for a fair and just transition to a zero carbon economy.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department is considering introducing smart meters into homes in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1438/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The introduction of smart meters or other smart technologies that capture energy usage data in homes will be considered through the development of a new Energy Strategy.

A Call for Evidence is currently out for consultation and closes on 20 March.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the cost of installing smart meters for gas and electricity consumers, in every home in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1439/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: A study carried out for my Department in 2016 estimated the total cost of rolling out smart meters for electricity customers to be £335million. No equivalent estimates are available for gas customers.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for the Economy how much money consumers of gas and electricity could save on average per year, if a smart meter was installed in their home.

(AQW 1440/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: A study carried out for my Department in 2016 estimated the total benefits of rolling out smart meters for electricity customers to be £320 million. No equivalent estimates are available for gas customers.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what plans are in place to attract potential inward investors to visit East Derry, when making choices about the location of future enterprises.

(AQW 1445/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest NI promotes the whole of Northern Ireland as an attractive and viable location for inward investment on the basis of a talented and loyal workforce, advanced telecoms infrastructure, high skilled business clusters, a pro-business environment, competitive operating costs and proximity to major markets.

The agency has also supported each council, including Causeway Coast & Glens as well as Derry City & Strabane District Council to develop investment propositions as part of Economic Development Plans for each region and continues to work with the councils to help attract investment.

It is the investor who makes the decision on where to visit and ultimately locate based on their specific business needs.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for the Economy to indicate when she expects natural gas to be extended to (i) Ballykelly; (ii) Greysteel; and whether her Department has given any consideration to the potential investment and demand for gas in the former army barracks at Shackleton.

(AQW 1446/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Ballykelly and Greysteel fall within the firmus energy gas distribution licence area. firmus energy has advised that these locations are not part of the company's current network development plan but remain under review.

Gas network extension proposals are subject to approval by the Utility Regulator and must provide sufficient gas loads to make network extension plans economically viable.

My Department has not considered potential demand for gas at the former Shackleton army barracks. If future developments at the site provide a sufficient gas load, provision of a gas connection could be considered by firmus energy and the Utility Regulator.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department has undertaken any work around the impact that a reduction in the VAT rate for the hospitality sector might have.

(AQW 1459/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department has not undertaken an assessment of the impact of a reduction in VAT on the hospitality sector in Northern Ireland. Taxation, including VAT, is generally an Excepted Matter that is the responsibility of the UK Government.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy (i) for an update on the Gas to the West project; and (ii) whether the projected (a) domestic; and (b) non-domestic uptake has been as expected.

(AQW 1484/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) The first phase of the Gas to the West project, the pipeline to Strabane, was completed in 2017 providing businesses and households the opportunity to switch from oil and connect to natural gas. The main pipelines to connect the remaining towns in the West to gas (Omagh, Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Enniskillen and Derrylin) were commissioned in July 2019.
- (ii) By end-September 2019, over 500 businesses and households in the West had connected to gas. As the main gas pipelines were only commissioned in July 2019, it is too early to comment upon uptake of gas in the West, however, it is noted that the five major energy users connected as soon as gas was available.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what steps her Department is taking, or has taken, to ensure that capital investment secured through city deals, will result in lower carbon emissions and will not further incentivise environmentally unsustainable practices.

(AQW 1512/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department is responsible for consideration and approval of City Deal innovation, digital and tourism projects. Local authorities are responsible for commissioning of these projects.

My officials are engaging with local councils and project owners on a range of issues including sustainability.

My Department will, therefore, consider energy sustainability during the business case approval process. To date, no City Deal projects have been submitted to the Department for approval as they are still being developed.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy for a breakdown of all electricity suppliers in the electricity market; (i) by gross customers per supplier; and (ii) by market share per supplier, displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1513/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

(i)

Suppliers	Total
Power NI	491,468
SSE Airtricity	181,871
Go Power	9,901

Suppliers	Total
Electric Ireland	101,751
Energia	7,259
Click Energy	30,343
Budget Energy	64,516
Naturgy	54
3T Power	449
Total Market	887,612

(ii)

Suppliers	Total - %
Power NI	55.4
SSE Airtricity	20.5
Go Power	1.1
Electric Ireland	11.5
Energia	0.8
Click Energy	3.4
Budget Energy	7.3
Naturgy	0.006
3T Power	0.05
Total Market	100%

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the total annual cost of importing fossil fuel energy inputs in each year since 2010, for; (i) electricity energy; (ii) non-electricity energy, broken down by year, and displayed in tabular form. (AQW 1602/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

(i) and (ii)

Heating oil (products such as kerosene and gas oil) and LPG have never been subject to the type of legislative and regulatory regime that applies to electricity and natural gas. Therefore, the type of information requested has never been compiled.

Going forward, this will be an issue for consideration in the development of the new Energy Strategy.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the dependence on imported fossil fuels, as a share of total energy inputs since 2010 for; (i) electricity energy; (ii) non-electricity energy, broken down by year, and displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1603/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Please see below table which details the percentage of electricity generated in Northern Ireland that comes from fossil fuels. Note that the Department considers that all fossil fuels are imported from outside Northern Ireland.

Percentage of electricity generated in Northern Ireland from fossil fuels (i.e. Coal, Gas or Oil)

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Percentage of electricity generation from fossil fuels	90%	86%	84%	81%	78%	74%	75%	66%	58%

Source: BEIS, Energy Trends: December 2019, special feature article - Electricity generation and supply figures for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, 2015 to 2018

This information is not available for non-electricity energy.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy whether the investment secured through City Deals will deliver additional renewable energy capacity for the areas affected, and, if so, to provide details of the same.

(AQW 1604/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The purpose of City / Growth Deals is to help the region support economic growth, create jobs or invest in local projects. Local councils are responsible for commissioning projects in their respective areas.

The emerging projects and proposals, relating to the remit of my Department, are currently in the policy areas of innovation, digital, tourism and skills.

Sustainable development will be considered as projects are developed. However, it is too early to know if sustainable measures will include onsite renewable energy generation.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for the Economy, in light of her recent commitment to reducing the use of fossil fuels, to outline (i) how many of her Department's fleet are diesel cars; and (ii) whether she has any plans to make all her Department's vehicles fully electric.

(AQW 1608/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department operates eleven official vehicles in total, including three diesel cars and one diesel Land Rover.

While there are no plans to change any of these departmental vehicles at present, I would be keen for the Department to consider all options when each vehicle reaches the end of its service life, including vehicles powered by electric or alternative fuels.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline whether funding has been considered for further capital works at South Eastern Regional College, Lisburn.

(AQW 1709/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: While the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) has not currently submitted any formal proposal to my Department for consideration, I understand that the College is considering a proposal for the creation of an Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre in Lisburn, in conjunction with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council as part of the Belfast Regional City Deal. The proposed development is on an existing College site adjacent to Castle House in the city and any proposal submitted to this Department will be subject to formal review prior to being considered for approval.

Whilst the College has no other plans for major capital investment at its Lisburn campus, my Department has already allocated £792k this year to SERC for use on a range of minor capital works schemes prioritised by the College across its wider estate, including the Lisburn campus.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister for the Economy, in light of the findings of the Rebalancing the NI Economy Report 2019, what action her Department will take to grow the social economy in Fermanagh and Tyrone.

(AQW 1732/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In April 2015, as part of the transfer of functions under the Review of Public Administration, social entrepreneurship transferred from the then Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to local government.

My Department leads on social economy policy. It chairs the Social Economy Policy Group (SEPG) which includes departments, agencies and local government. The Group's focus is to consider how departmental policies / programmes support sector growth across Northern Ireland and to contribute to the development of an integrated strategic approach to the social economy. The Department also funds Social Enterprise NI (SENI) to deliver a Social Economy Work Programme, which seeks to promote and raise awareness of the social economy sector in Northern Ireland. SENI commissioned the "Rebalancing the NI Economy Report 2019" and, in September 2019, presented it to the SEPG.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mrs Barton asked the Assembly Commission to detail expenses paid for driving duties to (i) outside contractors; and (ii) individuals, in the last three years.

(AQW 1309/17-22)

Mr K Buchanan (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission has not incurred expenditure for driving duties to (i) outside contractors and (ii) individuals during the last three years. The Assembly Commission understands that driving services to Ministers and others are provided by the relevant Department.

Ms C Kelly asked the Assembly Commission whether it will address the issue of period poverty amongst students and visitors to Parliament Buildings by making sanitary products freely available in visitor's toilets.

(AQW 1517/17-22)

Mr O'Dowd (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission has not previously considered the free provision of sanitary products to students and other visitors to Parliament Buildings. However, the Assembly Commission will now assess the feasibility of the free provision of sanitary products on a pilot basis.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission how many current Members (i) were registered for payroll giving through the GAYE Scheme as at 11 January 2020; and (ii) how many are now registered.

(AQW 2293/17-22)

Mr Butler (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Members' salaries are a matter of public record with a specific requirement under Standing Orders that sums paid by the Assembly to its current and former Members shall be published. However, the Assembly Commission does not comment on matters relating to the private financial affairs of Members. A charitable donation (or other form of voluntary, statutory or mandatory deduction from a Member's salary) relates to the private financial affairs of each Member.

Members may instruct the Finance Office in relation to the distribution of salary and Members' personal data may be processed for that purpose. The processing of personal data must be carried out in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. The first data protection principle requires that personal data be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner.

Processing is not limited to disclosure but includes carrying out any set of operations on the personal data, as set out in the Data Protection Act 2018. Processing that is not compliant with the first data protection principle of fairness, lawfulness and transparency is not permitted under the legislation. Fairness requires consideration of the purpose for which the information was provided by the Member and the legitimate expectations of the Member in relation to the use of that information when it is provided.

The purpose for providing information relating to a GAYE scheme is to facilitate charitable giving. It is the Assembly Commission's view that any instructions received by the Assembly Commission relating to how a Member's salary should be lawfully distributed must be processed in accordance with the first data protection principle.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 28 February 2020

Written Answers

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail any stock his Department has added to the lake at Loughgall Country Park, in the last five years.

(AQW 1558/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): The Department has a management agreement with Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council to manage the fishery at Loughgall Country Park.

There have been no stockings into the lake in the last five years.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how his Department is engaging with local councils regarding tree planting.

(AQW 1751/17-22)

Mr Poots: I intend to write to Council Chief Executives requesting their support and commitment to make any suitable land, owned by councils, available for tree planting. I will also invite each Council to nominate a senior official to join a cross-Governmental and Local Government Afforestation Forum to work with my officials to develop plans for the afforestation of available land.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to protect public health in the event of a zoonotic pandemic, such as a Coronavirus, especially within the intensive livestock sectors.

(AQW 1788/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department has stringent measures in place to protect public health from zoonoses (diseases which can be transmitted from animals to humans) in accordance with the relevant legislation, Directive 2003/99/EC on the monitoring of zoonoses and zoonotic agents.

The purpose of this Directive is to ensure that zoonoses are effectively monitored and that occurrences transmitted through food are investigated robustly.

DAERA, the Public Health Agency (PHA) and FSA have agreed procedures in place to manage any suspect or confirmed zoonosis case. In addition my Department routinely communicate and collaborates with the PHA and the FSA monitoring trends worldwide and conducting risk assessments as appropriate.

The Department's disease control strategies, which include actions to be taken in the event of a zoonotic outbreak where relevant, are published on the DAERA website. These include the notifiable avian disease (NAD) control strategy which details the measures to be taken when an epizootic disease such as Avian Influenza is suspected. Departmental veterinary officials investigate all reported cases promptly, serve restrictions on the premises, take samples for testing and depopulate affected flocks.

My Department is also responsible for the delivery of Official Controls on behalf of the FSA, which further assures the protection of animal and public health. Details of the delivery of these can be viewed at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/veterinary-public-health-unit-manual-official-controls>.

In relation to the Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), there is currently no evidence that any species of farm livestock kept for food was involved in the origin or transmission in China to humans of 2019-nCoV, or that 2019-nCoV is capable of infecting the types of food animal livestock farmed in Northern Ireland.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to monitor and reduce the volume of (i) antibiotic pollution; and (ii) antimicrobial resistant pathogens being disposed by land-spreading from intensive livestock units.

(AQW 1790/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department conducts seasonal sampling and testing to check for the presence and concentrations of antibiotics and antimicrobial resistance in our aquatic environment, including waste, receiving and bathing waters.

My Department also implements restrictions on the spreading of animal manures, chemical fertilisers and other nutrient containing materials onto lands. These include restricted spreading periods, methods, land application restrictions, slurry storage requirements and maximum application limits.

The Northern Ireland AMR Action Plan "Changing the Culture 2019-2024: One Health" published May 2019 seeks to enhance existing monitoring, reduction and prevention measures for the spread of AMR in the human, animal and environmental domains. The actions contained within this plan have raised awareness in the responsible use of medicines with the sales of antibiotics for use in food producing animals reducing by 53% in the four year period up to 2018.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) what measures he intends to take to prevent ammonia emissions exceeding the (a) EU National Emissions Ceiling Directive; and (b) UN Gothenburg Protocol legal thresholds; and (ii) how much is it estimated these measures will cost.

(AQW 1791/17-22)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland is expected to contribute to the achievement of UK targets under the EU National Emissions Ceiling Directive and the UN Gothenburg Protocol. In order to achieve ammonia reductions in Northern Ireland, I intend to bring forward an Ammonia Reduction Strategy which includes a series of practical on-farm measures. The precise nature of the measures to be included in this strategy will be subject to consultation. The total cost of these measures will depend of the mix of measures chosen however I intend to prioritise the measures which can be implemented most cost-effectively.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the current legislation relating to (i) commercial dog day care centres; and (ii) dog play parks.

(AQW 1801/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and the Animal Boarding Establishments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1974 (the 1974 Regulations) enable my Department to licence all forms of animal boarding establishments, including commercial day care centres.

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (the 1983 Order), as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, sets out how dogs should be controlled in public places, which include dog play parks. The 1983 Order states that the person in control of a dog is guilty of an offence if the dog attacks and injures any other animal owned by another person.

Local councils also have powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to make orders relating to dog control on any land to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access. This includes all parks and open spaces.

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides protection for the welfare of all dogs irrespective of the setting.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether he plans to introduce an afforestation strategy on public land; and (ii) if so, for a timescale.

(AQW 1898/17-22)

Mr Poots: I am keen to introduce an afforestation strategy on public land and I intend to write to Executive Ministerial colleagues and Council Chief Executives requesting their support and commitment to make any suitable public and council land available for tree planting. I will also invite Government Departments and Local Council representatives to participate in an Afforestation Forum to work with my officials to develop plans for the afforestation of public land. I have asked that the Afforestation Forum will meet initially in March and I expect that plans will be well advanced by autumn to allow planting to commence during the winter 2020/21 tree planting season.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the total budget provided to the Forest Service; (a) in gross terms; and (b) as a percentage of total Departmental budget, over the past five years; and (ii) whether there are plans to increase this budget.

(AQW 1900/17-22)

Mr Poots: As 2016-17 represented the first financial year of DAERA, only figures for three years are available.

Table 1 shows the information requested broken down into the four major spending components of Resource - Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL), Depreciation/Impairment (D/I) DEL, Capital DEL and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME).

Table 1:

Component	2018-19			2017-18			2016-17		
	DAERA	FS	Share	DAERA	FS	Share	DAERA	FS	Share
	£M	£M	%	£M	£M	%	£M	£M	%
Resource DEL*	190.4	2.4	1.3%	164.7	1.9	1.2%	198.5	2.8	1.4%
D/I DEL	22.9	1.8	7.9%	19.4	1.5	7.7%	17.5	1.3	7.4%
Capital DEL	63.8	1.2	1.9%	38.9	0.5	1.3%	38.8	1.6	4.1%
AME	21.4	5.1	23.8%	22.9	5.1	22.3%	22.3	5.1	22.9%
Total	298.5	12.5	4.2%	245.9	11.0	4.5%	277.1	12.8	4.6%

* Figures include budgeted Income to be received from Timber Sales in the year (Budgeted Income 18/19 – £10.7M, 17/19 - £11.72M and 16/17 - £10.2M).

Forest Service has identified a requirement for additional funding within the ongoing Departmental and NI Executive's budgetary processes to support increased planting of trees, as referenced in the 'New Decade New Approach'.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what investment has been made to address coastal erosion in the (i) Causeway Coast; and (ii) Foyle Estuary, in the last three years.

(AQW 1906/17-22)

Mr Poots: Responsibility for investment in measures to address coastal erosion is currently informed by the 'Bateman Formula' of 1967 and therefore my Department has not provided any specific funding in these areas within the last three years.

However, it is widely accepted that the 'Bateman Formula' is no longer appropriate and my Department is working collaboratively with the Department for Infrastructure to address this and provided £30,643 towards a baseline study and gap analysis of coastal erosion risk management in Northern Ireland. My Department has also secured £104,000 from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to gather further information on the state of coastal change and to assist in the establishment of a Coastal Change Assessment Partnership similar to those established in GB, but tailored to the specific needs of Northern Ireland.

This investment is improving the evidence base on which future policy relating to coastal erosion risk management can be developed, and should benefit all areas along the Northern Ireland coast that are at risk to coastal erosion.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on his Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.

(AQW 1912/17-22)

Mr Poots: I recognise that farmers and businesses are concerned about the impact of the NI Protocol could have on them. Successfully managing transition pre and post EU exit will provide a significant challenge for DAERA, the agri-food industry and other sectors.

An Executive sub-committee on EU Exit issues has been established and will be a key structure in the co-ordination of our response to the out workings of the Withdrawal Agreement including the Northern Ireland Protocol.

To support the Executive sub-committee the Executive Office have set up a cross-departmental Trade and Protocol group to co-ordinate the work of officials across all the affected Departments. This group will help ensure that Ministers can provide strategic oversight and direction to meet key activities. The scope of this work includes understanding the implications and practical delivery of the Protocol and ensuring the Northern Ireland position is represented in the decision making structures in Whitehall.

Many of the detailed arrangements for the implementation of the Protocol have still to be determined and will be subject to discussion between the EU and UKG through the Specialised and Joint Committee structures.

The Department currently has 253 staff working in Brexit related posts. We have assessed our need as slightly over 400 and there is steady progress in filling these posts. This will be kept under review.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when will a clean air strategy for Northern Ireland be published.

(AQW 1937/17-22)

Mr Poots: In December 2016, the previous DAERA Minister, Michele McIlveen, gave a commitment to develop an air quality strategy. Since then, the Department has been working on developing a draft Clean Air Strategy. This work involves close collaboration with other Departments and officials continue to work together to finalise the draft discussion document on the Clean Air Strategy.

Once the draft discussion document is complete, I will consider the options for issuing the draft Clean Air Strategy for public consultation later in the year.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs why the World Health Organisation's critical threshold for human health with particulate matter (PM2.5 pollutants) has not been implemented.

(AQW 1938/17-22)

Mr Poots: Air pollution can have a serious effect on people's health. Exposure to air pollution can have long-term effects on health, it also has negative impacts on our environment.

PM2.5 is monitored in Northern Ireland at two automatic monitoring stations, these are Belfast Centre and Londonderry Rosemount. In recent years there have been no exceedances of the EU limit values for PM2.5. The annual averages at both Belfast Centre and Londonderry Rosemount have been well below the limit values of 25µg/m³ and the more stringent value of 20µg/m³ which had to be achieved by 2020.

My Department is currently engaged in the preparation of a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Strategy will examine current air quality targets as well as guidelines for air quality, including those from the WHO on fine particulate matter, PM2.5. Once the draft discussion document is complete, I will consider the options for issuing the draft Clean Air Strategy for public consultation later in the year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline a timescale to bring forward a bill to implement Finn's Law.

(AQW 2004/17-22)

Mr Poots: I welcome the opportunity to explore the introduction of Finn's Law in Northern Ireland.

As this Law would introduce new offences and penalties I need to discuss it with my Ministerial colleague at the Department of Justice first and with my Executive colleagues. Thereafter I plan to bring forward a consultation and, depending on the outcome of the consultation, introduce legislation to the House.

I am hopeful that, with the support of the Assembly, this can be developed within this term.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to improve environmental governance as per (i) the recommendations of Professor Richard Macrory's report in 2004; and (ii) the New Decade, New Approach undertaking to establish an independent environmental protection agency.

(AQW 2093/17-22)

Mr Poots: Existing environmental governance arrangements date from 2008 with the establishment of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). At that time NIEA was retained as an executive agency within the Department. However, governance is much wider than the degree of independence of an agency.

I will consider the implications of the proposals in the New Decade, New Approach Agreement for the establishment of an independent environment agency to form part of the possible outline of a future Programme for Government. It would be necessary to scope the impact of the proposal before making decisions.

In the meantime I am considering the establishment of an independent environmental oversight body for Northern Ireland. I am currently seeking Executive agreement to extend the legislation to give effect to a Northern Ireland Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) and plan to issue a discussion document to gauge stakeholder views shortly.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to achieve net zero emissions.

(AQW 2094/17-22)

Mr Poots: Climate change is cross cutting and it will require action by everyone to ensure the UK net zero emissions target is met by 2050.

Following a request from my department the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published its "Reducing Emissions in Northern Ireland" report". The report sets out the CCC's recommendations on possible actions or policies that NI can take to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The recommendations are being considered by all NI Government Departments.

I have recently wrote to the CCC asking them to determine Northern Ireland's equitable contribution to the UK's Net Zero Target. On receipt of their response I will consider their recommendations before bringing forward a cross departmental pathway on climate change to the Executive for their agreement.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13.

(AQW 2095/17-22)

Mr Poots: My department leads on climate change and in addressing United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13 'Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.'

Sustainable development is embedded into the Programme for Government (PfG). My department has mapped UN SDG13 against PfG Outcome 2 'We live and work sustainably protecting the environment'. This outcome contains an indicator on greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change is cross cutting and it requires action from across all of government and all of society. Cross departmental discussions and actions on climate change are coordinated through the 'Future Generations Group on climate change', which I chair. Work is carried out through the Mitigation, Adaptation and Analysts sub groups, which are chaired by officials from my department and contains representatives from all NI Departments.

My Department sought advice from the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) on how Northern Ireland could reduce greenhouse gas emissions between now and 2030. In response the CCC published its "Reducing Emissions in Northern Ireland" report. The report sets out the CCC's recommendations on possible actions or policies that NI can take to reduce our emissions. These recommendations are currently being considered by all NI Government Departments.

My department laid the second Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme in September 2019. It provides governments' response to the findings of the most recent climate change risk assessment laid before parliament in 2017. It also, for the first time, contains a chapter, that sits outside government, setting out those adaptation actions being carried out in the sectors of civil society and local government which contribute to addressing the current and expected impacts of climate change in NI.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) what measures are being taken to prevent the further deterioration of water quality by 2021, as legally required under the Water Framework Directive; (ii) for his assessment of how these measures will be effective in preventing further breaches in legal requirements; and (iii) how much will it cost to implement these measures.

(AQW 2097/17-22)

Mr Poots:

- (i) In line with obligations under the Water Framework Directive my Department has adopted a holistic approach to catchment management. In 2015 it published its River Basin Management Plans for the period up to 2021, outlining 136 key existing and new measures to improve water quality status across all surface, groundwater and marine water bodies. We continue to deploy these measures and support other complementary measures such as the Farm Business Improvement Schemes and the Northern Ireland Water Capital Investment Price Control Programme (2015-2021). The Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) and the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) are two key agricultural measures designed to progress the River Basin Management Plan approach. Last year the NAP was strengthened to better address agricultural activities which could impact on the water environment. This included increasing buffer zones for slurry spreading, restricting or improving controls over the use of chemical phosphorus fertiliser, phosphorus rich manure and anaerobic digestate, and phasing in low emission slurry spreading equipment. The EFS is DAERA's agri-environment scheme, under the NI Rural Development Programme. It opened in 2017 and provides financial support to farmers to complete environmentally beneficial actions on their land to improve biodiversity and water quality. Through tranches 1 and 2 of the scheme some 1,200 km of watercourses have been protected. In recognition of the potential impact of both waste water and agricultural activities on water quality my Department implements a significant regulatory regime for discharges to waterways or underground stratum, setting quality standards which ensure the receiving environment can absorb the discharge without damage. In addition my staff undertake targeted investigation and regulatory inspection activities to ensure compliance with the requirements of both the Water Order and NAP Regulations. Utilising the most recent data and evidence my staff are targeting further investigations in 22 priority catchments based on water body status, number of failing elements and recent deteriorations. Catchment officers have identified approximately 230 actions and are working through these, and in partnership on a number of ongoing INTERREG funded projects designed to deliver improvements in the water environment.
- (ii) Water quality is impacted upon by a wide range of factors and the effectiveness of the measures being progressed by my department is influenced by the natural lag time for recovery and depends on the buy-in and successful implementation of the measures by all those using the land or discharging into the water environment. Non-compliance, delays or incomplete implementation of measures prolong improvements in water status and achievements of objectives. Despite all of the excellent work we have been doing, the time lag between the introduction of some measures and their impact on expected improvements means that it is unlikely that the 2021 objectives will be achieved.
- (iii) Some of the measures are no cost / low cost linked to education, advice and guidance as well as behavioural change, while others require significant investment. An initial estimate of the overall cost of delivering the River Basin Management Plan was of the order of £197 – 284m. However my Department has worked closely with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) on their price control process (2015-2021) and to date NIW has invested up to £231 million on specific improvements which will contribute to achieving improved water quality status since 2015 with a further £122 million to be invested in the final 2 years on schemes focusing on waste water treatment works (WWTW) and sewerage improvements to reduce the impact of NIW discharges on the receiving environment. Therefore in terms of major spend my department and Northern Ireland Water will spend around £431.6 million on Environmental Farming Scheme and capital investment programmes between 2015 and 2021.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) the proposed; or (ii) extra requirements that will be necessary for thoroughbred horses, reared in Northern Ireland, to be sold at auction sales in Republic of Ireland, following Brexit.

(AQW 2118/17-22)

Mr Poots: No changes have been introduced to the requirements for the movement of horses during the transition period following the UK's exit from the EU. Horses can therefore continue to move freely between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland during this time.

All horses must however, as before, be identified under the Equine Identification Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 and must be accompanied by a valid horse passport at all times.

All of the relevant guidance is available on the DAERA website, <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/>.

Vendors should also contact their sales company, in advance, for up to date sales advice and conditions of sale.

Arrangements following the transition period will depend on the outcome of UK negotiations with the EU which will take place in the interim. Further information will be posted on the DAERA website as it becomes available.

Please be assured that my officials continue to engage closely with their counterparts in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on these matters and will ensure that the thoroughbred industry is included in any future relevant stakeholder briefing sessions.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) the process; and (ii) timeline for the implementation of the draft Marine Plan.

(AQW 2149/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine Act (NI) 2013 require DAERA as the Marine Plan Authority to prepare marine plans within the framework of the UK Marine Policy Statement. This will facilitate the sustainable development of the marine area. The UK Government has published a 25 year Environment Plan that commits to having UK Marine Plans in place by 2021.

Initial formal public consultation on the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland closed on 15th June 2018 and work is progressing to publish a synopsis of responses to the public consultation.

The representations received from the public consultation are currently being considered. Officials have commenced engagement with stakeholders and relevant policy leads to work towards resolving matters raised in the representations and reflect these in the next iteration of the plan. In the event that matters raised through representations have not been resolved at this stage, I will give consideration to carrying out an Independent Investigation of the issues raised.

The Marine Plan for Northern Ireland will come into effect when it is published in final form and adopted. This will require Executive and DEFRA Secretary of State approvals.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to what extent the decision to extend the Islandmagee Gas Storage Project Consultation period was influenced by the applicant.

(AQW 2175/17-22)

Mr Poots: The decision to extend the consultation on the marine licence application, an Environmental Statement and Marine Environmental Conditions Update Report, was taken by the Department. The decision was not influenced by the applicant; however, they were advised that the Department was considering this option on 5 February.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when the applicant was made aware of the extension of the Islandmagee Gas Storage Project Consultation.

(AQW 2177/17-22)

Mr Poots: The applicant was advised that the Department was considering extending the consultation on the marine licence application, Environmental Statement and Marine Environmental Conditions Update Report for the proposed Islandmagee Gas Storage Project on 5 February 2020. My Department confirmed that the extension would take place with the applicant and on 12th February a notice/advertisement extending the consultation was issued by DAERA.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the rationale for extending the Islandmagee Gas Storage Project Consultation.

(AQW 2179/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Department received a letter alleging shortcomings with the public notice advertising the consultation on the updated application, Environmental Statement and Marine Environmental Conditions Update Report for the proposed Islandmagee Gas Storage project.

Following a review of the notice, the Department decided to re-advertise and extend the consultation using an amended notice.

DAERA has contacted all respondents informing them of the revised consultation closing date of 27 March. Respondents have also been advised that while they do not have to make a further response, they can use this period to add any additional comments in support of their views.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail what changes have been made to (i) NIEA in general; and (ii) the Environmental Crime Unit in particular, in line with recommendations made by the Mills Review in 2013. **(AQW 2268/17-22)**

Mr Poots: The following changes have been introduced following the Mills Review:

- A single Directorate, Resource Efficiency Division, was established in NIEA, bringing together regulatory and enforcement functions in waste and water management. This provides a more coordinated and streamlined approach.
- Introduction of a 'risk based matrix' inspections model for all waste management sites, targeting resources on sites which are non-compliant or at risk of becoming non-compliant.
- Changes to the 'Fit & Proper Person' test. Waste licence holders now have to meet more stringent rules to demonstrate their fitness to manage waste facilities including Criminal Record (CRO) checks and obtaining up-to-date technical certification every 24 months.
- Changes in the Environmental Crime Unit (ECU), now Enforcement Branch (EB), included restructuring into separate, dedicated sections with oversight against small scale, low risk waste crime incidents and larger scale, higher risk organised waste criminality respectively. An Assessment Section was also created, and further enhanced with the recruitment of a dedicated waste crime analyst.
- Improved, targeted recruitment and training, ensuring the necessary aptitude, skill set and experience, supplemented by in-depth induction and accredited training courses. EB now has an additional 5 criminal investigators with specialist skills in conducting criminal investigations and investigative practices.

Department for Communities

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Communities what action is being taken to increase the number of new builds in the social housing sector.

(AQW 273/17-22)

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities): During this current financial year 2019/20, the DfC is supporting the social housing sector to deliver 1,850 new build starts at a cost of £146m. The Department is also currently considering the future Social Housing Development Programme for the next three years which includes increased targets going forward.

In line with the Executive's New Decade, New Approach, the priority will be to enhance investment and agree new social home starts. The budget for the 2020/21 to 2022/23 Social Housing Development Programme and beyond has yet to be agreed. The number of homes to be provided therefore is governed by the amount of funding available from central government through DfC.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Communities (i) what plans her Department has to celebrate the centenary of Northern Ireland; and (ii) will her Department be opening any community grants programmes to encourage communities to celebrate the Centenary.

(AQW 512/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Within my Department, the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland will mark the centenary as part of a wider programme for recognising historical centenaries. The Department has no plans to open a specific community grants programme, however, it currently provides funding to the 11 NI local councils for the Community Festivals Fund. Councils provide match funding to this and administer the scheme on our behalf. Community organisations wishing to commemorate the centenary may be eligible to apply through their local council.

The Ulster Scots Agency has indicated its intention to deliver a programme of events to commemorate the centenary, the plans for which remain at a very early stage.

The British Government has made a commitment in their strand of New Decade, New Approach Deal to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021; and to make available funding for related projects. You will need to ask the British Government for update.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities, as part of the Office of National Statistics reclassification of housing associations, (i) whether she intends to abolish the house sales scheme (right to buy) and; (ii) if abolition is the preferred option, whether she will consider an alternative model of the house sales scheme.

(AQW 622/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In line with New Decade, New Approach I intend to bring forward legislation as soon as possible to facilitate reversal of the Office for National Statistics' classification of Housing Associations as Non-Financial Public Corporations. I am currently considering draft legislation.

In producing this draft legislation, my department conducted two public consultations, one of which was concerned with the future of the House Sales Scheme.

My immediate focus is on the reclassification issue, given both its urgency, significance and prominence in New Decade, New Approach. Should achieving reclassification then invite other policy considerations, I will consider those.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) what progress has been made on legislation to extend welfare supplementary payments; and (ii) whether this legislation will cover anything not included in the current package.

(AQW 963/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) My Department is taking all necessary steps to ensure appropriate legislation to extend the existing welfare mitigation schemes will be in place by 31 March 2020. The legislation will extend the current mitigation schemes only.
- (ii) Officials are currently developing proposals for a review of the welfare mitigation measures as detailed in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. I can provide an assurance that as part of the review officials will be engaging with key stakeholders in the independent advice sector. Any proposals for further mitigations will also give due consideration to my Department's equality and human rights responsibilities. The outcome of the review will be presented to the Executive in due course.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has plans to manage the Winter Fuel Payment locally, rather than through the Department of Work and Pensions.

(AQW 993/17-22)

Ms Hargey: There are no plans in place to manage Winter Fuel Payments locally, rather than through the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the current rate of Carer's Allowance; and (ii) whether there are plans to review or increase the rate.

(AQW 1016/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) The current weekly rate of Carer's Allowance is £66.15.
- (ii) This rate will be increased to £67.25 from 6 April 2020 as part of the annual social security benefits up-rating exercise. The 1.7% increase is in line with the growth in the Consumer Prices Index over the 12 month period ending September 2019.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Communities what plans she has to legislate for the requirement to use sign language where appropriate, on the basis of the consultation completed in July 2016 and referred to in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQW 1018/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I fully support the introduction of legislation to ensure that users of both ISL (Irish Sign Language) and BSL (British Sign Language) have the same rights, opportunities and quality of life as those of us in the hearing community.

I have asked my officials to develop proposals on how to take this important commitment forward

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the number of social homes being built each year; and the effectiveness of support being made available to the Housing Executive and other Housing Associations to construct new homes.

(AQW 1076/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive estimates that we need at least 2,000 units to meet the growing need for social housing and address backlog issues. Annual targets in recent years have fallen short of this figure as the budget has been constrained by pressures on capital budgets.

I am committed to increasing the number of social homes being delivered each year.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities to detail the (i) number of people on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Housing waiting list; and (ii) average waiting time and number of points before allocation, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 1077/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has advised that the total number of applicants on the social housing waiting list on the final day of the last available quarter (31 December 2019) was 38,308 applicants.

It has provided the following tables (1 – 2) which provide the average waiting times and number of points before allocation, i.e. at the point of allocation for one year to 31st December 2019, broken down by council area and parliamentary constituency;

and table 3, which provides the Housing Executive Common Landlord Areas which cross Parliamentary Constituency boundaries.

Table 1 - Average waiting time and number of points at the point of allocation by Local Government District for 1 year to 31st December 2019.

LGD	Allocations for 1 Year to 31/12/19				
	No.	Mean Points at the Point of Allocation	Median Points at the Point of Allocation	Mean Months on the WL at the Point of Allocation	Median Months on the WL at the Point of Allocation
Antrim & Newtownabbey	511	142.1	140.0	18.2	9.0
Ards & North Down	653	156.2	148.0	16.5	8.0
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	535	111.6	120.0	16.9	9.0
Belfast	1892	147.0	142.0	24.6	15.0
Causeway Coast & Glens	420	124.1	130.0	19.0	10.5
Derry & Strabane	863	169.1	170.0	26.3	17.0
Fermanagh & Omagh	302	131.6	137.0	18.4	10.0
Lisburn & Castlereagh	424	148.7	150.0	19.7	13.0
Mid & East Antrim	560	132.4	126.0	18.0	10.0
Mid Ulster	335	120.0	130.0	23.4	12.0
Newry, Mourne & Down	493	145.0	148.0	29.5	16.0
Total	6988	143.0	140.0	21.8	12.0

Table 2 - Average waiting time and number of points at the point of allocation by Parliamentary Constituency for 1 year to 31st December 2019.

Parliamentary Constituency	Allocations for 1 Year to 31/12/19				
	No.	Mean Points at the Point of Allocation	Median Points at the Point of Allocation	Mean Months on the WL at the Point of Allocation	Median Months on the WL at the Point of Allocation
Belfast East	378	138.0	137.5	17.4	11.0
Belfast East/South	51	151.5	148.0	20.4	12.0
Belfast North	833	140.3	140.0	21.7	13.0
Belfast South	382	143.8	140.0	23.2	12.5
Belfast South/Strangford	7	177.3	160.0	10.4	10.0
Belfast West	471	164.9	168.0	32.4	20.0
Belfast West/North	22	136.5	140.0	33.8	21.5
Belfast West/South	18	190.5	160.0	34.9	18.0
East Antrim	292	134.6	130.0	15.7	8.0
East Londonderry	267	130.5	132.0	19.6	12.0
Fermanagh South Tyrone	265	132.9	140.0	21.0	12.0
Foyle	713	180.2	180.0	27.7	18.0
Lagan Valley	349	150.9	150.0	20.1	13.0
Mid Ulster	233	115.5	130.0	21.8	11.0
Newry & Armagh	272	130.2	140.0	24.1	12.0
North Antrim	474	125.2	124.0	19.4	10.0

Parliamentary Constituency	Allocations for 1 Year to 31/12/19				
	No.	Mean Points at the Point of Allocation	Median Points at the Point of Allocation	Mean Months on the WL at the Point of Allocation	Median Months on the WL at the Point of Allocation
North Down	340	164.6	150.0	18.8	9.5
South Antrim	295	137.8	137.0	17.8	9.0
South Down	295	138.4	142.0	28.5	16.0
Strangford	381	144.1	140.0	15.3	7.0
Upper Bann	373	117.7	124.0	18.8	10.0
West Tyrone	277	121.5	130.0	19.8	11.0
Total	6988	143.0	140.0	21.8	12.0

Table 3 – Housing Executive Common Landlord Areas which cross Parliamentary Constituency boundaries.

NIHE CLA	Parliamentary Constituency
Cregagh Castlereagh	Belfast East/South
Willowfield/Upper Castlereagh Road	Belfast East/South
Bridge End / Rotherdam Court	Belfast East/South
Carryduff	Belfast South/Strangford
Ainsworth	Belfast West/North
Twaddell/Upper Woodvale	Belfast West/North
Carrick Hill / Unity Flats	Belfast West/North
Hamill St / John St	Belfast West/South

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Communities to detail the £200,000 capital of reduced requirements for multi-sports stadium project in the 2019-20 January Monitoring Round.

(AQW 1119/17-22)

Ms Hargey: For the 2019/20 Financial Year, the opening capital allocation for the Multi-Sports Stadium Programme (comprising the capital allocations to the Regional Stadia Programme and Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer) was £5.02million.

When it was evident that Casement Park Stadium construction could not commence within the 2019/20 Financial Year, an easement of £4.32million was recorded within the June 2019 monitoring round, which reduced the capital allocation to £0.7million for the Multi-Sports Stadium Programme.

By mid-December 2019, a decision on the Casement Park Planning Application had not been made and project activities associated with the allocated budget could not be completed. Therefore £0.2million was returned as an easement.

The easement figure of £0.2million does not represent a reduction in the 2019/20 budget of the Multi Sports Stadium Programme, which is ring-fenced and cannot therefore be used by the Department for other capital projects.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has any plans to investigate why upwards of 60 per cent of CAPITA Personal Independence Payment assessments are overturned on appeal.

(AQW 1122/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Capita do not make the benefit decisions which are appealed. They provide assessment reports to the department's decision makers who use that as evidence to make the actual benefit decision. It is that decision which is appealed.

The assessment report provided by Capita in each application is only one piece of evidence considered by Departmental decision makers when making a determination on a claim. The PIP2 application form, further medical evidence gathered as part of the claim process, or evidence from a previous Disability Living Allowance claim for example, are all given due consideration before a decision is made. A rigorous set of quality controls are in place to ensure Capita provide fit for purpose reports.

My Department is committed to getting decisions right first time and since its introduction on 20 June 2016 just over 200,000 PIP decisions have been made. Approximately 10% of these decisions have proceeded to appeal. The number of decisions overturned at Appeal represents 3% of all decisions made.

Decisions overturned at appeal have been primarily as a result of new evidence being provided at the Tribunal hearing which was not available to the Department, or the Tribunal taking a different view of the evidence available to the Department when the decision was made, with neither conclusion being unreasonable.

In seeking improvements to the decision-making process my Department has in place a feedback mechanism that includes analysis of overturned appeals and the findings are regularly discussed with Capita. My Department has also recently introduced improvements to the reconsideration process which is intended to obtain any additional information at that point which may lead to decisions being revised and to prevent unnecessary appeals.

The second independent review of PIP will also consider evidence gathering and the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman is also examining this matter as part of their investigation. My Department will carefully consider any recommendations arising from these reports when published.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities whether the Ulster Grand Prix will take place in 2020; and what support her Department is offering.

(AQW 1206/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Ulster Grand Prix Ulster is organised by the Dundrod and District Motorcycle Club and it is a matter for the club to determine the viability of holding the event in 2020.

I am aware of the issues regarding the event, therefore I have written to my Executive colleague the Minister for the Economy, to suggest a meeting to discuss the financial challenges facing this year's event.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities for an update on any plans to develop a sports museum to celebrate the success of local sports people.

(AQW 1212/17-22)

Ms Hargey: This issue has been considered by my Department on several occasions since the matter was first raised by the Ulster Sports Museum Association in 2007. There are currently no plans to develop a sports museum.

Notwithstanding this, my Department continues to recognise and celebrate the achievements of local sporting people through a range of activities including the invitation to our athletes and teams who have been successful in their sport in the previous year, at local, national or international level, to attend my Department's Annual Celebration of Sport event. DfC will continue to support and celebrate our sporting heritage achievements in this way.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities to detail any proposed new build housing in Newry and Armagh over the next three years, broken down by (i) Housing Association; and (ii) location.

(AQW 1222/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I can advise you that 11 social housing units have been completed in this year, 214 new units are on site and a further 511 units programmed to start through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2019/20 – 2021/22. The details of which are as follows:

Social housing completions to-date in 2019/20

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completed Year
Choice	49 Bearnna Park	Killeavy	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2018/19	2019/20
Habinteg	12A Clanrye Avenue	Newry	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2017/18	2019/20
Rural	2,4,6,8 Culowen Quay	Blackwatertown	Off The Shelf	General Needs	4	2019/20	2019/20
Triangle	St Brigids Park	Culloville	New Build	General Needs	5	2017/18	2019/20

Social housing units under construction

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Habinteg	Carnagat Road	Newry	New Build	General Needs	24	2017/18	2020/21

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Habinteg	Carnagat Road	Newry	New Build	Elderly CAT1	14	2017/18	2020/21
Habinteg	Carnagat Road	Newry	New Build	Wheelchair	6	2017/18	2020/21
Radius	Lindsays Hill	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	14	2016/17	2019/20
Radius	83/89 Drumalane Road	Newry	New Build	General Needs	52	2017/18	2020/21
Radius	Ardmore Road	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	45	2018/19	2021/22
Radius	42 Belfast Road	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	16	2018/19	2020/21
South Ulster	Canal Street, Phase 4	Newry	New Build	General Needs	7	2016/17	2020/21
South Ulster	Canal Street, Phase 4	Newry	Rehabilitation	General Needs	8	2016/17	2020/21
Triangle	Ardmore Road Phases 2 & 3	Armagh	New Build	General Needs	20	2017/18	2019/20
Triangle	Ardmore Road Phases 2 & 3	Armagh	New Build	Wheelchair	3	2017/18	2019/20
Triangle	1-5 Carrickanny Close	Belleeks	Off The Shelf	General Needs	5	2018/19	2019/20

Programmed to start 2019/20 – 2021/22 (501 units)

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	Craigmore Way	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	250	2019/20	2022/23
Apex Housing	Craigmore Way	Newry	Design & Build	Wheelchair	30	2019/20	2022/23
Ark	18-52 Ogle Street	Armagh	Design & Build	General Needs	36	2019/20	2021/22
Ark	18-52 Ogle Street	Armagh	Design & Build	Wheelchair	4	2019/20	2021/22
Ark	Bessbrook / Camlough ESPs	Bessbrook	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2019/20	2019/20
Ark	Bessbrook / Camlough ESPs	Camlough	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	2	2019/20	2019/20
Ark	5 Millvale Mews	Bessbrook	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2019/20	2019/20

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Ark	50-52 Hill Street	Newry	Off The Shelf	General Needs	16	2019/20	2019/20
Radius	158 Tassagh Road	Keady	New Build	Wheelchair	1	2019/20	2020/21
Rural	21 Culowen Quay	Blackwater-town	Off The Shelf	General Needs	1	2019/20	2019/20
Radius	Drumgullion Avenue	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	27	2020/21	2022/23
Radius	Forkhill Phase 3	Forkhill	New Build	General Needs	20	2020/21	2021/22
South Ulster	Drumalane	Newry	New Build	General Needs	22	2020/21	2021/22
Rural	21 Culowen Quay	Blackwater-town	Off The Shelf	General Needs	1	2019/20	2019/20
Radius	Drumgullion Avenue	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	27	2020/21	2022/23
Radius	Forkhill Phase 3	Forkhill	New Build	General Needs	20	2020/21	2021/22

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
South Ulster	Drumalane	Newry	New Build	General Needs	22	2020/21	2021/22
South Ulster	Belfast Road	Newry	Design & Build	General Needs	7	2020/21	2022/23
South Ulster	Belfast Road	Newry	Design & Build	Elderly CAT1	12	2020/21	2022/23
South Ulster	Belfast Road	Newry	Design & Build	Wheelchair	1	2020/21	2022/23
Apex Housing	Watson's Road	Newry	New Build	General Needs	70	2021/22	2023/24

Programmed schemes can be lost, or slip to future programme years, for a variety of reasons e.g. relating to site acquisition/ achieving Planning permission. Additional schemes can also be added to the SHDP through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory/Off-the-shelf properties in-year, and through the annual housing association bidding round/programme formulation process.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities whether consideration is being given to making capital funding available to sports groups for the enhancement and development of existing sports facilities.
(AQW 1223/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I can confirm that my Department and Sport NI are considering a number of capital funding programmes which will contribute to the enhancement and development of existing sports facilities.

The programmes under consideration by my Department include the Small Capital Grants Programme and the Access and Inclusion Programme. Sport NI are considering programmes which will provide improved infrastructure, will address health and safety issues and will provide better access and inclusion for participants involved in sport and physical activity.

These programmes will be subject to securing budgets for delivery in the 2020/2021 financial year.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities whether the Northern Ireland Housing Executive applies the Fair Employment Policy when recruiting new employees; and, if so, for a breakdown of staff members relating to community background in each of its offices.
(AQW 1238/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive is an Equal Opportunities employer and welcomes applications from all suitably qualified candidates.

All appointments are based solely on merit and are governed by the Housing Executive's Appointments and Promotions Policy and Procedures.

The Housing Executive has provided the following tables detailing the breakdown of its staff by community background and office location.

Table 1 - Total

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
NIHE - Religious Profile	1214 (42.2%)	1538 (53.5%)	123 (4.3%)	2875 (100.0%)

Table 2 – Belfast Region

		Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
		581 (40.8%)	764 (53.7%)	79 (5.5%)	1424 (100.0%)
Area	Location				
Belfast	Housing Centre	326	526	40	892
	Lanyon Place	138	152	25	315
DLO	Belfast	117	86	14	217

Table 3 – North Region

		Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
		293 (42.7%)	375 (54.7%)	18 (2.6%)	686 (100.0%)
Area	Location				
South Antrim	Antrim	23	13		36
	Newtownabbey 1	24	#	#	#
	Newtownabbey 2	14	#		#
East	Magherafelt	#	#		#
	Larne	#	#	#	#
	Carrickfergus	15	#		#
Causeway	Coleraine	24	21	#	#
	Ballymoney	#	#		#
	Limavady	#	#	#	#
	Ballycastle	#	#		#
West	Waterloo	#	36		#
	Waterside	#	10	#	#
	Collon Terrace				#
	Strabane	#	11		#
Regional	Twickenham	91	100	#	#
	Richmond	22	110	#	#

		Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
DLO	Pennyburn	#	#		#
	Coleraine	29	14	#	#
	Ballymena	#	#	#	#

Table 4 – South Region

		Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
		340 (44.4%)	399 (52.2%)	26 (3.4%)	765 (100.0%)
Area	Location				
North Down & Ards	Bangor	19	#	#	#
	Newtownards	17	#	#	#
South	Armagh	#	10		#
	Banbridge	#	#	#	#
	Portadown	#	14		#
	Lurgan	#	17		#
Lisburn & Castlereagh	Lisburn	28	24	#	#
	Dairy Farm	#	19		#
	Castlereagh	48	12	#	#
South Down	Newry	#	38		#
	Downpatrick	#	25		#
South West	Omagh	12	50		62
	Fermanagh	11	25	#	#
	Dungannon	#	17		#
	Cookstown	#	#		#
Regional	Marlborough	58	84	#	#
	Strangford House	73	23	#	#
DLO	Portadown	35	19	#	#

Please Note:-

Given the protocol that such information should not be disaggregated in circumstances where there are less than 10 in any particular group, to ensure that the identities of any individual cannot be inferred from the data provided, information has been provided as a total based on each office location.

Similarly, in circumstances where identity may be inferred from the office location total, this information has not been provided.

* Figures as at January 2020:-

- includes staff on external secondment and those on career break;
- excludes agency workers.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of Housing Executive tenants waiting for an extension to their home; and (ii) the length of time they have been waiting.

(AQW 1247/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The table provided below details (i) of the total number of Housing Executive tenants who have applied, and are waiting, for major adaptations (extensions) and (ii) the length of time waiting.

Figures provided are correct as at 31/01/2020.

Number of Housing Executive tenants who applied for major adaptations.	Length of time awaiting completion as at 31/01/2020 (Months)
29	0-3
46	4-6
58	7-9
38	10-12
40	13-15
36	16-18
57	19-24
28	25-30
20	31-36
17	37-48
7	49-60
1	60+
Total number of tenants: 377	

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the amount of Government money (i) spent on; and (ii) allocated to (a) Ravenhill/Kingspan Stadium; (b) Windsor Park/National Stadium; and (c) Casement Park Stadium, since 6 April 2011.

(AQW 1251/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In March 2011 the Executive endorsed a Regional Stadia Programme with an overall programme budget of circa £130million that included an Executive grant funding commitment of £110million. The Kingspan Stadium (UBIRFU) and the Windsor Park Stadium (IFA) are complete and are delivering benefits in their operational phases. The Casement Park Stadium (UCGAA) will be the final project of the Regional Stadia Programme.

Since 6 April 2011 the grant funding allocated and expended on the two completed stadia projects is £16.5million on the Kingspan Stadium and £31million on the Windsor Park Stadium.

The current allocation of Executive grant funding to the Casement Park Project is £62.5million.

To date £10.3million has been expended by the Department on the Casement Park Project.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the timescale for completion of the upgrade to Casement Park Stadium.

(AQW 1252/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The completion of Casement Park is a key priority under the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement and I am fully committed to completing this important project.

The Casement Park Redevelopment has suffered significant delays as a consequence of the Judicial Review of the Department of Environment (DoE) grant of the original Casement Park Planning Permission, dating from December 2013.

The Ulster Council of the GAA (UCGAA) has submitted a revised Planning Application on in February 2017, which continues to be assessed by Department for Infrastructure. I have engaged with Minister Mallon to impress on her the need for the assessment of the Planning Application to be progressed with urgency.

I have spoken to my Executive colleagues about the need for the complex approval processes associated with the project to be concluded with pace.

I have asked my officials to take forward the final pieces of work associated with the UCGAA Full Business Case without delay. Progress towards construction commencement can then be considered when all the relevant project funding is in place.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the progress of Business Improvement Districts in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 1253/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have been established in the Belfast City Council area with support and funding from the Department for Communities; Belfast One in the city centre, Destination CQ in the Cathedral Quarter

and Linen Quarter BID. These BIDs are still in the early stages of delivery (Year 2-4) and their success will only be judged once they have completed their 5 year terms and go to re-ballot. Emerging feedback from BID Managers indicates that they are having a positive impact in their areas.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of current provision of one-bedroom, wheelchair-accessible residential accommodation in the Belfast South constituency.
(AQW 1254/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has advised that there is currently only one, one-bedroom partially wheelchair accessible social home on the Accessible Housing Register, within the Belfast South Parliamentary Constituency. There are however a further five one-bedroom wheelchair accessible units to be added to the Register in May 2020.

You may also wish to note that there are a further 43 fully wheelchair accessible and 115 partially wheelchair accessible properties currently in the constituency

There are 338 social housing units programmed to start in Belfast South constituency through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2019/20 – 2021/22. A number of these schemes will include the provision of wheelchair accessible units; however, the agreed housing mix for some of these schemes has yet to be finalised.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Communities what action he will take to ensure that the Executive establishes a child funeral fund to ease the burden on families suffering.
(AQW 1267/17-22)

Ms Hargey: A Children's Funeral Fund provides parents who have gone through the tragedy of a child bereavement with a means by which they can provide a funeral, thereby easing some of the financial burden. It is a priority of the restored Executive to establish a Fund.

This is a welcome initiative regarding a very sensitive matter.

I can confirm that my officials will be drawing up options to establish a suitable fund for my consideration.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities to detail the housing waiting list per constituency, as at 31 December 2019.
(AQW 1301/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The following table provided by the Housing Executive details the social housing waiting list on the final day of the last available quarter (31 December 2019), broken down by Parliamentary Constituency.

Parliamentary Constituency	No.
Belfast East	1889
Belfast East/South	378
Belfast North	3942
Belfast South	2516
Belfast South/Strangford	102
Belfast West	3489
Belfast West/North	101
Belfast West/South	26
East Antrim	1527
East Londonderry	1970
Fermanagh South Tyrone	1728
Foyle	3785
Lagan Valley	1754
Mid Ulster	1099
Newry & Armagh	1988
North Antrim	2102
North Down	1648
South Antrim	1408
South Down	1700

Parliamentary Constituency	No.
Strangford	1373
Upper Bann	2300
West Tyrone	1483
Total	38308

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Communities what youth services are (i) funded by; or (ii) provided by her Department in (a) the Ballyclare area; and (b) South Antrim.

(AQW 1347/17-22)

Ms Hargey: While my Department does not directly fund or provide youth services in the Ballyclare and South Antrim areas, my Department funds a Community Development Officer in Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal programme. Part of the role of this officer is to leverage funds from other sources to enable delivery of youth programmes including summer schemes, youth clubs and sport related interventions in both these areas.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of fixed odds betting terminals operational in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1378/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department does not gather information in respect of the number of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals operating in Northern Ireland and I am not aware of any central source where it could be obtained.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities whether she is aware of the amount of funding provided by the gambling industry in Northern Ireland to people suffering from gambling addiction.

(AQW 1379/17-22)

Ms Hargey: A number of organisations provide support to those who have a problem with gambling and I am aware that some of these are funded in part by the gambling industry; as this is done on a voluntary basis my Department is not aware of the total amount provided.

However, I am aware that the NI Turf Guardians Association contributes approximately £24,000 per year to Dunlewey Addiction Services.

My Department is currently consulting on the law around gambling, seeking views on what should be included in any future legislation. One of the questions raised in the consultation is whether there should be a statutory requirement for the gambling industry to contribute to the funding of research, education and treatment of problem gambling.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities whether she has any plans to run a public awareness campaign around the issue of problem gambling.

(AQW 1380/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am concerned about the levels of gambling addiction and associated issues. The most recent gambling prevalence survey carried out by my Department in 2016 found significantly high rates of problem gambling.

I am currently consulting on the law around gambling and intend to discuss the issue of intervention for problem gambling with the Minister of Health in due course.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities for her Department's assessment on the number of people in Northern Ireland gambling (i) online; and (ii) in betting shops.

(AQW 1381/17-22)

Ms Hargey: It is not possible to state the exact number of people who gamble online and in bookmaking offices. However I am aware that the Gambling Prevalence Survey conducted by my Department in 2016 found that 15.8% of the respondents participated in online gambling. This is a significant increase from the 2010 survey in which 6.7% of respondents stated they had gambled online. More information on the survey can be found using this link www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2016-northern-ireland-gambling-prevalence-survey.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of operational betting shops in each constituency.

(AQW 1382/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Bookmaking office licences are issued by the courts; my Department does not hold information in respect of the number of bookmaking offices currently operational in each constituency.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities how her Department has made claimants aware of the option for Universal Credit to be paid into separate accounts; and how many Universal Credit awards have been split between the members of a couple.
(AQW 1441/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Information on payment options, including split payments is available on nidirect. Nidirect is the citizen facing government information portal.

I am committed to ensuring that appropriate support is available and accessible to vulnerable people. Those making a claim to Universal Credit can discuss payment options, including split payments, when they attend their local Jobs & Benefits office for an initial evidence interview or when making a claim by telephone.

Accurate data on split payments is not currently available from the Universal Credit IT system as split payments may be linked together with the other payment flexibilities i.e. direct payments to landlord and the more frequent twice monthly payments.

Information on alternative payment options including split payments is available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/universal-credit-payments-and-advance-payments>

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline plans to create a public realm initiative for Millisle village.
(AQW 1454/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department does not have any plans to progress a public realm scheme for Millisle at this time.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities how many complaints has the Local Government Commissioner for Standards received in each year since 2015; and how many were investigated.
(AQW 1464/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, which makes provisions for the ethical standards framework for district councillors, gives the Local Government Commissioner for Standards (the Commissioner) authority to investigate and adjudicate on allegations that councillors have breached the Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors. All complaints regarding alleged breaches of the Code must be sent to the Commissioner's Office for consideration.

As the Commissioner operates independently, the Department does not hold information on the number of ethical standards complaints that have been received and investigated by the Commissioner's Office.

However, the Commissioner publishes a Report each year that contains statistical information on ethical standards cases, and this is available on the Commissioner's website.

<https://nipso.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NILGCS-Annual-Report-2017-18.pdf>

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities how much expenditure has the Local Government Commissioner for Standards incurred dealing with complaints, in each year since 2015.
(AQW 1465/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Local Government Commissioner for Standards (the Commissioner) is an independent operating authority. My Department does not hold all the details of how much expenditure the Commissioner incurs.

However, the Commissioner publishes an Annual Report each year that contains funding and expenditure information, and this is available on the Commissioner's website at:

<https://nipso.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NILGCS-Annual-Report-2017-18.pdf>

The amounts of council funding that were notified to my Department by the Commissioner in each year since 2015 are set out below:

(£)

2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
227,795	271,000	273,000	441,000

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities (i) for her assessment of funding for the Supporting People programme over the last decade; and (ii) whether she will commit to maintaining the ring-fenced funding for the Supporting People programme and to additional investment.
(AQW 1532/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

(i) The budget allocation over the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	Initial Budget Allocation £
2019/20	72,798

Year	Initial Budget Allocation £
2018/19	72,798
2017/18	75,400
2016/17	72,798
2015/16	73,198
2014/15	72,381
2013/14	70,149
2012/13	66,922
2011/12	63,221
2010/11	61,886
Total	701,551

I note that a report from SITRA (policy training and consultancy for supported housing) estimates that every £1 spent on the Supporting People programme saves the public purse £1.90.

I am also encouraged to see that the 2015 Review found that the Supporting People programme has achieved its core aims, delivering significant quality of life benefits to those who have received services, assisting the resettlement of people from institutional settings and preventing problems which could have led to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness.

I am keenly aware of the need for Supporting People services:

- (ii) my priority is protecting the most vulnerable in our society and targeting resources to support those in greatest need. I aim to protect the budget for Supporting People, as my Department has successfully done despite competing financial pressures over the past number of years.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities when she will publish the findings of the strategic needs assessment arising from the Department's Review of the Supporting People Programme in November 2015.

(AQW 1533/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive intends to publish its strategic, evidence-based assessment of need for the Supporting People Programme by September 2020.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities how many Personal Independence Payment appeal tribunal hearings have been deferred due to problems with medical evidence, since 2017.

(AQW 1546/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The current issue regarding the production of medical evidence to the tribunal arose in April 2019. When an appeal is lodged with the Appeals Service, following due process, in accordance with the regulations and established practice, the appeal is listed before a tribunal panel.

It is a matter for the panel to adjudicate on the appeal; the panel may request medical evidence from the appellant to support their appeal. This is a judicial decision. Since April 2017, the tribunal panel has adjourned 7,338 cases as a result of requests for medical evidence.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities what the average waiting time is for a Personal Independence Payment appeal hearing after a request for an appeal is made.

(AQW 1547/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The average waiting time for a Personal Independent Payment appeal from receipt of appeal to final determination is 33.5 weeks. From receipt of a Personal Independence Payment appeal to first date of hearing takes on average 24.5 weeks.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities how many decisions have been changed or overturned since 2017 as part of the mandatory consideration process during Personal Independence Payment appeals.

(AQW 1548/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The most recent Personal Independence Payment statistics were published in November 2019 and covered the period up to 31 August 2019. Since 1 January 2017 to that date 51,010 mandatory reconsideration decisions had been made with 10,380 decisions changed. Decisions are changed because additional evidence is provided at the reconsideration stage which was not available to the officer who made the initial decision.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities whether GAMSTOP is available to gambling consumers in Northern Ireland; and, if so, whether the Department knows how many people have utilised the service.

(AQW 1559/17-22)

Ms Hargey: This question has been referred to my Department as I have responsibility for gambling policy and legislation.

GAMSTOP is available to Gambling consumers. GAMSTOP have advised my Department that, at November 2019, 2939 consumers from here had registered with the service.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities when her Department plans to conduct a further problem gambling prevalence survey.

(AQW 1560/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department carried out gambling prevalence surveys in 2010 and 2016; the timing of the next survey has not yet been agreed.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities whether it holds any data on the number of people who have self-excluded from betting shops.

(AQW 1561/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department does not gather information in respect of the number of people who have self-excluded from bookmaking offices.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities who is responsible for regulating gambling advertising.

(AQW 1562/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The 1986 Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements Order 1985 sets out the law in respect of local gambling advertising on radio, television and on billboards.

The advertising of gambling products and services must comply with the Advertising Codes issued by the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP) and administered by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

Under Section 5 of the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014 it is an offence for any remote (online) operator to advertise to consumers unless they hold the appropriate Gambling Commission licence.

Enforcement of the law is a matter for the PSNI.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Communities what measures are available through her Department to assist local councils in addressing dilapidation in their areas.

(AQW 1565/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department works closely with local councils to address dilapidation in their areas through Public Realm and Revitalisation schemes. Financial support has also been made available to owners since 2016 to tackle listed buildings at risk through the Historic Environment Fund.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Communities what regulations govern entertainment licencing; and when they were last updated.

(AQW 1572/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Article 3 of, and Schedule 1 to, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 provides that indoor venues wishing to provide entertainment in the form of theatrical performances; dancing, singing or music; circuses; or sporting contests or exhibitions (such as boxing, wrestling, judo, karate, billiards, pool, snooker or darts) must obtain an entertainment licence from the local council. Outdoor musical entertainments must also be licensed by the council.

The legislation has not been substantively updated since its introduction but work on a review of the licensing system is currently ongoing in my Department.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Communities whether there is any requirement for an entertainment licence for an unamplified performance of live music between the hours of 8:00am and 11:00pm in the current regulations.

(AQW 1574/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Under Article 3 of, and Schedule 1 to, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 indoor venues which charge for admission for the purpose of entertainment or for the provision of meals or refreshments must be licensed by the local council to provide musical entertainment. Outdoor venues on private land wishing to provide public musical entertainment must also be licensed by the local council. This applies to musical entertainment, amplified or not, irrespective of the hours during which it is intended to be provided.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Communities what steps her Department will take to address targets for new social housing in rural communities, that have been missed in four out of the last five years.

(AQW 1575/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am committed to increasing the number of social homes in both rural and urban areas.

It is disappointing that the rural social housing target has not been achieved over recent years, but I am assured that the Housing Executive, through its new Rural Strategy & Action Plan, is making efforts to address rural social housing need. Senior officials have recently engaged with the Rural Residents Forum on this issue and are to meet with Housing Executive to explore further and consider options.

Development in rural locations comes with significant challenges particularly in terms of land availability. The Housing Executives dedicated Rural and Place Shaping Teams will continue to work with rural communities and their representatives to examine their housing needs and continue to encourage and support housing associations in the delivery of new build schemes to address social housing need.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Sport Matters strategy.

(AQW 1583/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Sport Matters was endorsed by Executive as The Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation. The status of the Sport Matters targets are reported on by the Sport Matters Implementation Groups and are published on my Department's website.

The most recent report from December 2018 is available at:- www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/sport-matters-implementation-group-progress-report-01-oct-2017-30-sep-2018

In terms of delivery:-

- 13 targets had been achieved;
- 11 targets were on track for achievement; and
- 1 target was considered to on track for achievement, but with some delay or uncertainty.

Sport Matters will continue to provide strategic direction for the sector until a new strategy is published. Work to develop and consult on a new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity has commenced.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities, given that her Department's contract with Post Office is due to end on November 2021, (i) for an update on the new payment exemption service; and (ii) whether Post Office card account customers will be able to continue to access and use their accounts after this date.

(AQW 1586/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) My Department is currently working with officials in the Department for Work and Pensions to establish a replacement payment exception service to ensure those customers who cannot manage mainstream accounts can still have access to their benefit/pension payments. The commercial options and timescales are currently under consideration and I will be given an opportunity to consider these in due course.
- (ii) Following the end of the Post Office card account contract, people will no longer be able to access or use their existing Post Office card accounts. People are encouraged to switch from their Post Office card account to a mainstream account ahead of contract end. For those unable to access or manage a mainstream account, my Department will offer a replacement payment exception service. Some customers may have difficulty with changing their current method of payment and support services are available to assist them with choosing a product that suits their circumstances.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities (i) what is the staffing compliment of the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People; and (ii) what is its annual budget.

(AQW 1592/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The staffing compliment of the Commission for Children and Young People is 19.5 (Full Time Equivalent).

The Annual Budget for the Commission for Children and Young People for 2019/20 was £1,509,000. The budget for 2020/21 has not yet been confirmed.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities to outline her plans to bring pre-tenancy fees legislation in line with the rest of the UK and Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1607/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Housing, and in particular the role and regulation of the Private Rented Sector, is one of my priorities. The Department is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector to ensure the regulatory framework and supporting policy improve standards for the benefit of both tenants and landlords. The areas being reviewed include:

- Supply
- Affordability
- Security of tenure
- Tenancy management
- Property standards
- Dispute resolution

The Review will also include consideration of regulation of letting agents, including if further legislation is required to prevent letting agents charging tenants unfair fees.

A court ruling in December 2017 found that existing Department of Finance legislation, the Commission on Disposal of Land (NI) Order 1986, prohibits letting agents from charging a tenant fees for services carried out on behalf of a landlord. The result of the court case was publicised by Housing Rights and by my Department through the Landlord Newsletter. I am currently giving consideration to further communication on this to the sector.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of people in North Down in receipt of Personal Independence Payment, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1629/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The most recent Personal Independence Payment statistics were published in November 2019 and covered the period up to 31 August 2019. The information requested is set out in the table below;

Year	Number of recipients in North Down Assembly Area
September 2016 – August 2017	1,010
September 2017 – August 2018	3,330
September 2018 – 31 August 2019	5,140

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities whether she has any plans to restore the Rates Support Grant.

(AQW 1631/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The level of the Rates Support Grant (RSG) budget for 2020/21 will be set when the Departmental Budget has been confirmed. The overall level of RSG that will be available next year can only be considered in the context of the wider budgetary position of the Department for the 2020/21 financial year.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities whether her Department has any plans to provide funding support for advice organisations such as Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service and other welfare advice centres.

(AQW 1632/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department provides significant funding for the delivery of independent, community based advice services, as follows:

- £1.8m annually, through the Community Support Programme. This is match funded by Councils who take responsibility for commissioning and distribution of funding in their local communities.
- £1.5m annually, through Fresh Start Agreement welfare mitigations funding. This supports a Freephone Helpline, additional face to face services and legal support.
- £122,000 annually, to the Law Centre NI, through Fresh Start Agreement welfare mitigations funding for advice and specialist appeal representation.

In 2019/20, in recognition of increasing workloads being experienced by the advice sector, directly related to benefit appeals; additional funding of £320,000 was made available from Fresh Start Agreement welfare mitigations funding.

I am committed to protecting those most in need across our society. Access to community based, independent advice services, including help with making an appeal, is critical to meeting that commitment.

My Department is therefore working at pace to ensure that, in line with commitments set out in 'New Decade, New Approach', the extension of welfare mitigations, including continuation of additional funding for advice services, takes place from 31st March.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities how her Department is supporting female participation in soccer.

(AQW 1662/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Increasing female participation in sport and physical activity is a target in the Sport Matters Strategy and a priority for my Department. As a result, my Department and Sport NI have provided both financial and practical support to the sector to grow female participation in sport, including soccer.

Since 2016, the Department and Sport NI have invested approximately £1.2 million to support the delivery of the women in sport strategy "Active, Fit and Sporty." This investment included funding to build on the legacy of hosting the UEFA Women's Under 19 European Football Championship Finals in 2017.

Since 2018, Sport NI has provided Exchequer and Lottery funding of £915k to a number of football clubs. This funding has helped to improve health and safety at facilities and increase access and participation opportunities for both male and female teams.

In terms of practical support, Sport NI has facilitated a Pathway Health Check process for the IFA, in order to provide a baseline from which the IFA can develop the Women's performance system within the sport. This work will help the IFA deliver against its Girls and Women's Strategic Plan for 2019-2024.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Communities whether she will meet with Belfast City Council about potential departmental support for investment in Belfast Zoo.

(AQW 1675/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I have no plans to meet with Belfast City Council about Belfast Zoo.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail the community background of staff employed in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, broken down by regional office.

(AQW 1679/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has provided the following tables detailing the breakdown of its staff by community background and regional office location.

Regional Locations

Belfast Region

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
Housing Centre, Belfast	326 (36.5%)	526 (59.0%)	40 (4.5%)	892 (100.0%)
Lanyon Place, Belfast	138 (43.8%)	152 (48.3%)	25 (7.9%)	315 (100.0%)

North Region

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
Twickenham House, Ballymena	91 (46.2%)	100 (50.7%)	6 (3.1%)	197 (100.0%)
Richmond Chambers, Londonderry	22 (16.3%)	110 (81.5%)	3 (2.2%)	135 (100.0%)

South Region

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Not Known	Total
Marlborough House, Craigavon	58 (39.5%)	84 (57.1%)	5 (3.4%)	147 (100.0%)
Strangford House, Newtownards	73 (72.3%)	23 (22.8%)	5 (4.9%)	101 (100.0%)

The information provided relates to staff based in Regional Locations. It does not include those based at Local Office locations or those from Direct Labour Depots.

Figures are at January 2020. They include Staff on External Secondment and those on Career Break, but exclude Agency Workers.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities to detail the current General Fund balances as a percentage of operating expenditure for each district council.[R]

(AQW 1688/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The requested figures have been extracted from the 2018-19 certified accounts for each district council and are shown in the table below:

Council	2018-19 Certified Accounts Figures		
	General Fund £'000	Operating Expenditure £'000	General Fund as Percentage of Operating Expenditure
Antrim & Newtownabbey	7,341	55,271	13.3%

Council	2018-19 Certified Accounts Figures		
	General Fund £'000	Operating Expenditure £'000	General Fund as Percentage of Operating Expenditure
Ards & North Down	3,422	70,255	4.9%
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	19,798	85,555	23.1%
Belfast City Council	25,797	181,081	14.3%
Causeway Coast & Glens	3,672	60,818	6.2%
Derry & Strabane	5,119	71,453	7.2%
Fermanagh & Omagh	3,502	43,992	8.0%
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	18,776	56,758	33.1%
Mid & East Antrim Council	4,201	68,278	6.2%
Mid Ulster Council	5,030	46,961	10.7%
Newry Mourne & Down	11,870	74,099	16.0%

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities how her Department ensures ongoing good governance and financial management by district councils. [R]

(AQW 1689/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Councils are separate legal entities and as such are responsible for their own administration. My Department has responsibility for the following legislation which sets the governance and accountability framework in which councils operate:

- the Local Government (NI) Order 2005 and the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (NI) 2015 set out the requirements placed on councils in relation to their keeping of accounts, the provisions in relation to the audit of those accounts and the powers of my Department and the Local Government Auditor in relation to the accounts;
- the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 provides for the financial administration of councils and places a duty on a council to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs; and
- the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 makes provision for:
 - the democratic governance arrangements including the allocation of positions of responsibility and committee places across the political parties and independents represented on a council,
 - the making of arrangements for the discharging of council functions,
 - the permitted forms of governance and decision-making arrangements to provide for fair, transparent and efficient decision-making,
 - arrangements for the regulation of the proceedings and business of a council,
 - openness and transparency arrangements including access to meetings and documents,
 - the ethical standards framework, including the mandatory Code of Conduct for councillors, associated investigation, adjudication and appeals mechanisms and the role of the Local Government Commissioner for Standards,
 - the Performance Improvement framework to support the continuous improvement in the delivery of council services, and
 - the general intervention powers available to all Departments.

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 provides a performance improvement framework for councils which includes a duty for councils to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. Statutory guidance issued by my Department clarifies this as “a Council must have in place arrangements that assess the effectiveness of its functions and services, including clear and appropriate arrangements for political and managerial scrutiny and accountability.”

Part 12 also includes the provisions in relation to the NI Audit Office audit to determine whether a council has discharged its duties under Part 12 and also assess whether a council is likely to comply with the requirements of this Part.

My Department receives a copy of each council's audit report and will discuss any issues with the council concerned. As part of ongoing collaboration my Department meets with local government and the NI Audit Office on a regular basis to discuss performance improvement and any issues that may arise.

My officials also hold quarterly meetings with all Council Finance Officers, NI Audit Office and a representative from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE NI) to discuss financial, audit and governance issues.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities how her Department assesses the robustness of district rates struck by district councils. [R]

(AQW 1690/17-22)

Ms Hargey: District councils are separate legal entities and are statutorily responsible for setting the non-domestic and the domestic district rate for their district council area by 15 February each year.

However, as the setting of the district rates is a statutory function of councils, if the Department was concerned about any aspect of this process the Department could, under Part 14 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, sections 104 to 107, direct a council to make a report and return, and give the Department such information with respect to the exercise of the council's functions as may be specified in the direction. The Department may also request an inquiry to be held or an investigation to be carried out under the above legislation.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities to detail the powers held by her Department to intervene and remedy governance or financial management issues identified within district councils. [R]

(AQW 1691/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department has a number of powers of intervention which are summarised in the following table:

The Local Government Act (NI) 2014	
Section 100	<p>Where the Department is satisfied that the council is failing or likely to fail with the requirements of Performance Improvement, the Department may direct a council to-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepare or amend an improvement plan or to follow specified procedures in relation to such a plan; carry out a review of its exercise of specified functions; enter into specified arrangements with another council; set specified improvement objectives for itself under section 85. <p>Any Department may direct a council to take any action it considers necessary to secure the council's compliance with the requirements of Performance Improvement.</p> <p>Where this section applies, any Department may direct-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> that a specified function of a council must be exercised by that Department; and the council must comply with any instructions of that Department in relation to the exercise of that function and must provide assistance as required by that Department.
Section 104	Any Department may direct a council to make a report or return or supply specific information with respect to the exercise of the council's functions.
Section 105	Any Department may cause such local and other inquiries to be held along with such investigations it sees fit in connection with the administration of any statutory provision relating to the functions of a council/committee/sub-committee.
Section 106	<p>Any Department may, after an inquiry or investigation has been completed and the Department is satisfied that the council has failed to discharge any of its functions, make an order that the council is in default and direct a council to take action, within a specified period.</p> <p>If the direction is not complied with the Department may under an order empower an officer of the Department to exercise or procure the exercise of, the function in question.</p> <p>The Department must pay the expenses of an officer but these must be re-paid by the council.</p>
Section 107	<p>If any Northern Ireland department considers that any action proposed to be taken by a council would be incompatible with any international obligations, that department may direct that the proposed action must not be taken.</p> <p>If any Northern Ireland department considers that any action capable of being taken by a council is required for the purpose of giving effect to any international obligations, that department may direct that the action shall be taken.</p> <p>A direction under this section must give the reasons for making the direction and may make provision having retrospective effect</p>

The Local Government (NI) Order 2005	
Article 22	The Department may at any time direct the local government auditor to hold an extraordinary audit of the accounts of a local government body and that an extraordinary audit may be held after 3 days' notice in writing given to the body whose accounts are to be audited.
Article 26	The Local Government Auditor shall, if required by the Department or the chief local government auditor, undertake comparative and other studies designed to enable them to make recommendations for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services by councils

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the financial and governance situation at Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. [R]

(AQW 1692/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am aware of the financial position of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council and my officials have met with the Chief Executive of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council regarding the Council's current financial and governance situation.

As a result of these meetings, I wrote to both the Mayor and the Chief Executive of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council on 7 February 2020 directing the Council, under section 104 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, to supply my Department with:

- detailed information on the Council's current financial position;
- a proposed Recovery Plan; and
- information on how, and the timescales within which, the Council intends to address the issues raised by the NI Audit Office in both the Report To Those Charged With Governance and the Improvement Assessment.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities why the Appeals Service is unable to provide details on how many appeals were attended by MLAs.

(AQW 1702/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Appeals Service records whether the appellant has been represented but it is not a requirement to record the status of the representative.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what funding has been allocated to assist social security claimants to challenge a negative decision through a tribunal.

(AQW 1762/17-22)

Ms Hargey: To allow anyone who does not agree with the outcome of a benefit claim to challenge that decision, my Department provides significant funding for the delivery of independent, community based advice services, as follows:

- £1.8m annually, through the Community Support Programme. This is match funded by Councils who take responsibility for commissioning and distribution of funding in their local communities.
- £1.5m annually, through Fresh Start Agreement welfare mitigations funding. This supports a Freephone Helpline, additional face to face services and legal support.
- £122,000 annually, to the Law Centre NI, through Fresh Start Agreement welfare mitigations funding for advice and specialist appeal representation.

In 2019/20, in recognition of increasing workloads being experienced by the advice sector, directly related to benefit appeals; additional funding of £320,000 was made available from Fresh Start Agreement welfare mitigations funding.

I am committed to protecting those most in need across our society. Continued access to community based, independent advice services, including help with making an appeal, is critical to meeting that commitment.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the changes that her Department has requested the Department for Work and Pensions make to the Universal Credit IT system that have been (i) made; (ii) denied; or (iii) still pending.

(AQW 1763/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Universal Credit (UC), as with other social security benefits, is delivered through a single system, developed and managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Department for Communities (DfC) initially requested changes to the Universal Credit IT system to facilitate the payment flexibilities agreed by the Executive.

DWP has been very supportive in working with my Department over the past number of years in delivering, on an incremental basis, the requested changes, all of which have been accepted. All the requested changes put forward by my department have been accepted and delivered on an incremental basis.

To date the majority of those changes have now been implemented, the focus of which have been on improving payment timeliness for people claiming UC, ensuring that vulnerable people are financially supported. Whilst there are a small number

of further changes still outstanding for instance, the collection of data required under Section 75 legislation, none of these pending changes impact the service delivered to people here claiming UC.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful social security appeals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1765/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The number of successful and unsuccessful social security appeals over the last 5 years are set out in table below.

	Successful	Unsuccessful
2015/2016	3,240	9,129
2016/2017	2,725	6,157
2017/2018	2,727	3,012
2018/2019	3,964	3,569
April 2019 – December 2019	3,708	2,761

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 323/17-22, to detail the changes to the football landscape since the 12-week consultation on the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme closed on 22 February 2016.

(AQW 1766/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to delivering the Sub Regional Stadia Programme and ensuring that it meets the current and future needs of football. That includes ensuring that the Programme is inclusive, open, fair and transparent. Some examples of how things have moved on since the 12-week consultation on the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer closed on 22 February 2016, include:

- Organisational changes that impact how local football is administered and structured e.g. in 2016 the NIFL operated Championship 1 acquired senior status and Championship 2 became the Premier Intermediate League;
- An increased focus on qualifying for European competitions as success in Europe significantly raises the income of the Premiership clubs. In the next 3-year European competition cycle (2021-24), an additional 3rd tier competition has been proposed which may make it easier for a club to qualify for a group stage;
- The development and publication of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority's Green Guide (6th Edition), which was endorsed by the Department in November 2018, reflects how changes to security, Health and Safety provision, ground management and stadia design have evolved;
- The role of Councils and the changing demands for sports facility provision following Local Government Reform in 2015 and the Community Planning engagement process; and
- The IFA's current consultation exercise aimed at introducing new ground criteria for Intermediate Clubs. That restructuring could see a significant reduction in the number of teams competing at that level.

In terms of inclusion growing participation in sport, particularly amongst under-represented groups, is a priority for my Department and any investment in soccer must include provision to meet those challenges.

The level of participation at grassroots and amongst under-represented groups has changed the demands for certain facilities. The number of small-sided games being played by girls and boys, aged five to eleven continues to grow. The IFA's 5-year Strategy 2017-2022, Promoting, Fostering and Developing Football for All indicates that the number of children taking part has increased by 16% year-on-year.

The number of women and girls participating in football at all levels has increased significantly as indicated in the IFA's Girls' and Women's Strategic Plan 2019-2024 as has the growth in disability football which is being driven by the publication of the IFA's 2016 – 2020 Disability Strategy.

It is important that in delivering the Sub Regional Stadia Programme that the current and future needs of everyone playing the game are fully considered.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities what is the average length of stay for people accessing emergency homeless accommodation in (i) Annesgate hostel; and (ii) Centenary House.

(AQW 1772/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive does not record the average length of stay for individual hostels. The Homelessness Strategy Year 2 Annual Progress Report (www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/Homelessness-Strategy-annual-progress-report-2019) provides details of the average length of stay for all placements provided by the Housing Executive across the five categories of temporary accommodation. Both Annesgate Hostel and Centenary House are within the Voluntary Sector Hostels category, with further details on the average length of stay for 2018/19 provided in the table below:

Accommodation Type	Average Length of Placement (Days)
Single Lets	437
DIME (Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency Accommodation)	128
Voluntary Sector Hostels	231
Housing Executive Hostels	208
Hotel/B&B	18
All	281

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Communities whether she will publish an assessment of Capita's effectiveness in assessing Personal Independence Payment claimants.

(AQW 1824/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to ensuring that people being assessed for Personal Independence Payment receive an effective service. There are no current plans to publish an assessment of Capita's effectiveness. My Department has robust contract management arrangements in place to ensure Capita's effectiveness meets the contractual targets, including Quality of Assessments, Clearance Times, Customer and Call Waiting Times, and Customer Satisfaction.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Communities whether Capita is subject to a schedule of fines if it does not meet a set standard of quality in Personal Independence Payment assessments.

(AQW 1825/17-22)

Ms Hargey: At any time, should Capita fail to meet the targeted level of quality they are subject to a financial penalty which my Department calculate and apply in accordance with the contract.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Communities what provision her Department has made for Personal Independence Payment claimants for whom the assessment causes severe anxiety.

(AQW 1826/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My department recognises that attending a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment can be a stressful experience and improvements have been made to reduce assessments where possible. This includes reducing the review frequency for pensioners and people with severe or progressive conditions.

Every application for PIP undergoes an initial review conducted by a Disability Assessor in Capita with training to identify people who may be considered vulnerable due to their condition or severe anxiety. Where vulnerability is identified, particular care is taken to ensure that the assessment process is appropriate to the needs of the customer. This may include a paper based assessment or specific arrangements to support the person at the consultation.

In advance of attending a face-to-face consultation, people will be given the opportunity to alert Capita of any additional requirements they may have and Capita will meet any such reasonable requests. People identified as being vulnerable, including having mental health or learning disabilities, can access additional support at any point in the claim or assessment process, for example help filling in the form. Additional protections are in place in the event of failure to return the questionnaire or to attend a face-to-face assessment.

As a further safeguard, people attending assessments are encouraged to bring another person with them, for example, to reassure them or to help them during the assessment. The person chosen is at the discretion of the person being assessed and might be (but is not limited to) a parent, family member, friend, carer or advocate. This can be particularly helpful for people with mental, cognitive or intellectual impairments who may not be able to provide an accurate account of their condition due to a lack of understanding or unrealistic expectations of their ability.

In addition to this a number of other steps have been taken to improve awareness of PIP and the assessment process including my Department hosting five awareness sessions in conjunction with Capita, Advice NI and the Law Centre and last autumn my Department published two short videos which provide information on the assessment activities and scoring mechanism and on what to expect at a PIP assessment

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the Supporting People budget in each of the last five years; and whether she intends to increase the current budget.

(AQW 1895/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) The Supporting People budget allocation in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	Initial Budget Allocation £000s
2019/20	72,798
2018/19	72,798
2017/18	75,400
2016/17	72,798
2015/16	73,198

I am keenly aware of the need for Supporting People services:

- (ii) my priority will be protecting the most vulnerable in our society and targeting resources to support those in greatest objective need. I will aim to protect the budget for Supporting People, as my Department has successfully done despite competing financial pressures over the past number of years.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities (i) when she intends to introduce the regulations to extend existing welfare reform mitigations; and (ii) what mitigations will be extended by regulation.

(AQW 1897/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) Officials are currently drafting the necessary legislation to extend the existing welfare mitigation schemes beyond 31 March 2020. The draft Regulations will be laid before the Assembly for consideration in the coming weeks.
- (ii) As agreed in the New Decade, New Approach deal I am committed to extending all of the existing welfare mitigation measures.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 514/17-22, for a breakdown of the £40.4m forecasted costs for continuing to deliver the existing welfare mitigation schemes in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

(AQW 1915/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- The Department has submitted bids to Department of Finance to secure the funding required to continue existing Mitigation payments beyond 31st March 2020.
- The Department's initial bid submitted to the Department of Finance for 2020/21 and 2021/22 totalled £40.4m per year. This bid was revised on 24th January 2020 to £41.7m in 2020/21 and £42m in 2021/22. This revised forecast reflects the latest projections in respect of the impact of updated caseloads for Social Sector Size Criteria and Benefit Cap mitigations and associated administration costs.
- A breakdown of the Department's revised bid to continue existing Mitigation payments beyond 31st March 2020 is provided in the following table.

Forecast costs to continue existing Mitigation payments beyond 31st March 2020	2020/21 (£m)	2021/22 (£m)
Social Sector Size Criteria	23.3	23.6
Benefit Cap	3.5	3.5
Children transferring from DLA to PIP	5.8	5.8
Disability related mitigations	5.1	5.1
Administration and IT Costs	4	4
Total Forecast Costs	41.7	42

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 955/17-22, (i) when she will publish the findings of the review of Discretionary Support; (ii) whether there will be a public consultation on the review; and (iii) when any such consultation will be launched.

(AQW 1916/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) The Discretionary Support policy review identified several key issues which require further consideration. Once I have fully assessed these issues the outcomes of the review will be shared with the Assembly. A date for releasing this information has not yet been confirmed.
- (ii) I anticipate that a public consultation on the future design of the Discretionary Support policy will be conducted. This will allow for input from key stakeholders and members of the public.
- (iii) If a consultation is taken forward this is likely to be launched in the Spring. Further details of any consultation, including the start date, will be shared with the Assembly alongside the findings from the review.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to list the names and addresses of people successfully prosecuted for benefit fraud in week commencing (i) 27 January 2020; and (ii) 3 February 2020.
(AQW 2052/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Last month I took the decision that my Department would not publish information relating to individuals convicted of benefit fraud. This information is already in the public domain as a result of court proceedings.

Department of Education

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1289/17-22, how many children have been waiting beyond 26 weeks for a statutory assessment.
(AQW 1927/17-22)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): Of the 2,108 children who are currently undergoing statutory assessment, 944 (44.8%) are waiting in excess of 26 weeks. Of the 944 children, 445 (47.1%) have a valid exception recorded against them.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1289/17-22, how many Education Authority staff are required during the course of an individual statutory assessment.
(AQW 1928/17-22)

Mr Weir: The number of Education Authority (EA) staff required during the course of an individual statutory assessment varies depending on the individual child's special educational needs.

Within the EA, there are a team of staff who support the statutory assessment process, including Educational Psychologists and staff from the EA's Support Services, e.g. Behaviour Support Team, Autism Advisory and Intervention Service, Literacy Support Service, Sensory Support Service, and Early Years Service.

In addition, staff within EA's Special Education Statutory Operations are responsible for overseeing the completion of the statutory assessment process from receipt of referral to finalisation of a Statement of Special Educational Needs where appropriate.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail any programmes being delivered in (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools that seek to improve the mental health and resilience of teaching and non-teaching staff.
(AQW 1942/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education (DE) is not the employer of teachers, and is not responsible for the training and development or for the health and resilience of teachers. Teachers are employed by the Board of Governors (BoG) for each school setting, with the training and development of teachers carried out in conjunction with the relevant employing authority; such as the Education Authority (EA) in respect of controlled schools; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in respect of maintained schools. In the case of Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools the individual BoG is both the employer and the employing authority.

Your question was referred to the EA and CCMS for input. The information they have provided is attached at Annex A and B respectively.

EA response

Although the EA does not currently deliver a specific mental health programme for staff across primary and post-primary schools, individuals and teams of EA staff work with in partnership with schools to deliver services to improve staff wellbeing. The EA will continue to deliver these services in line with our new Health and Wellbeing strategy which was formally launched in January 2020. The attached table sets out the EA Health and Wellbeing initiatives currently planned in conjunction with primary schools and post-primary schools in 2020.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy demonstrates EA's commitment to the overall health of our staff to enable the achievement of those goals. This strategy aims to improve awareness and provide opportunities for staff to take action and invest in their own mental and physical health. EA is aware of the wide variety of initiatives within our schools and recognises the need to ensure a holistic approach to staff health and wellbeing.

In October 2019 EA hosted two Health and Wellbeing Conferences aimed at primary and post-primary schools which were attended by over 300 school leaders.

EA is currently developing a pilot Coaching Service for school principals. Coaching, in this context, is a confidential, one to one personalised service, which has been shown to be an effective and powerful tool to support the development of individual and organisational performance, through unlocking individuals' potential and capability.

This service aims to support school principals to continue to lead effectively in an increasingly demanding climate. It also develops their coaching skills, as a means of supporting other staff through a whole-school approach.

To date 174 principals have participated.

A digital Health and Wellbeing Hub, accessible to all EA staff, will be introduced in the near future and will contain information and updates on initiatives that are being made available to teaching and non-teaching staff in schools. It will also provide advice and guidance on a range of issues that impact on employees' mental and physical health.

Listed below are some of the initiatives/programmes funded by DE, the EA, or through external funding, being delivered in schools to improve the mental health and resilience of teaching and non-teaching staff.

- Staff INSET training (health and wellbeing focus for all staff)
- Action mental health workshops (all staff)
- Mental Health fairs / Mental Health Week
- Yoga (for staff and pupils)
- Meditation (all staff)
- Health and Wellbeing focus for NSSI projects (Network of Shared School Improvement – funded by Atlantic Philanthropies – no cost to the school).
- Health and Wellbeing workshops funded by Shared Education Funding (Atlantic Philanthropies)
- Mental health community days
- Community resilience programmes (created by teachers for teachers)
- A Mile a Day
- MensSana (charity supporting resilience, mental health and emotional wellbeing for all age groups)
- Mind Your Mate (charity supporting mental health and suicide awareness)
- Keep fit for staff (lunchtime and after school)
- Wellbeing Champions

EA is also aware of individual schools and school clusters organising events and initiatives focused on the mental health of teaching and non-teaching staff in schools, some of which is funded through the schools themselves, however EA does not hold this information centrally.

Annex B

CCMS response

CCMS does not have a training remit to deliver programmes in our schools (this would be the responsibility of the EA) but all staff in all our schools, Nursery, Primary and Post-Primary have immediate access to the Employee Assistance Programme provided by Inspire (formerly Carecall). This includes counselling on issues at work, relationships, family pressures, financial concerns etc. The service is free and confidential with an aim to reduce anxiety and improve sense of purpose and wellbeing for staff.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail any new programmes or initiatives being considered for (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools that will seek to improve the mental health and resilience of pupils.

(AQW 1943/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department is working collaboratively with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency, the Health and Social Care Board and the Education Authority to develop an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework that will aim to enhance support for children and young people in primary and post-primary schools. The emphasis will be on promotion, prevention and early intervention, including how services can be augmented to support schools, and their pupils.

The Framework is still under development and the timeframe for implementation including new programmes or initiatives will be subject to additional resources being made available.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail programmes being delivered in (i) primary schools ;and (ii) post-primary schools that seek to improve the mental health and resilience of pupils.

(AQW 1944/17-22)

Mr Weir: There are many programmes being accessed by our schools related to mental health and resilience though given the delegation of budgets schools often engage organisations directly to support the mental health and resilience of their pupils.

From a Departmental perspective I can confirm the following relevant programmes to illustrate the support provided:

- **iMatter 'Optimising Achievement Coaching Model for Principals'** – this is being delivered in both primary and post primary and includes both pre and post programme evaluations to identify measurable change in behaviours, practices, knowledge of the Principal and more widespread collaborative, reflective practice evident throughout the school.
- Many schools in the **Extended Schools programme** are using this funding to provide emotional health and wellbeing support, including counselling. Such schools assess the impact of the programme in their school, and report the outcome to the Education Authority in the form of an annual report.
- In addition to the work in schools, the EA Youth Service, in partnership with the Public Health Agency, has developed the **Facilitating Life and Resilience Education (FLARE) programme**. The aim is to support young people to build internal reserves of confidence, resilience and positive aspirations to promote mental health and wellbeing. FLARE is measured using the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE) tool. CORE 10 is a young person specific adaptation and not only serves to measure change in risk indicators across participation but also can be used as a risk assessment to indicate risks that may require immediate and professional support.
- **Curriculum Sports Programme** – the Irish Football Association (IFA) and Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) deliver this in primary schools. In 2019/20, the Sports Programme will provide support, information, advice and resources to schools in promoting young people's mental health and wellbeing by providing 3,000 sessions that educate pupils about sustaining health, growth and wellbeing. It is monitored on an ongoing basis with our delivery partners to ensure it meets its targets within budget and delivers value for money.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to detail how his Department assesses and measures the success of programmes being delivered in (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools that seek to improve the mental health and resilience of pupils.

(AQW 1945/17-22)

Mr Weir: There are many programmes being accessed by our schools related to mental health and resilience though given the delegation of budgets schools often engage organisations directly to support the mental health and resilience of their pupils.

From a Departmental perspective I can confirm the following relevant programmes to illustrate the support provided:

- **iMatter 'Optimising Achievement Coaching Model for Principals'** – this is being delivered in both primary and post primary and includes both pre and post programme evaluations to identify measurable change in behaviours, practices, knowledge of the Principal and more widespread collaborative, reflective practice evident throughout the school.
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Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1089/17-22, whether (i) he believes that allowing academic in-year testing at the age of 13 is in keeping with the Dickson Plan; and (ii) does he believe this constitutes a significant change to the Dickson plan, where academic selection is postponed to the age of 14 and over.

(AQW 1948/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Dickson Plan system sees children transferring to Junior High Schools at Year 8 without the use of academic selection. Children transfer again at Year 11 and at this stage some children are selected for admission by means of academic selection.

Were a school to cease the use of academic selection, or conversely to commence its use, this would constitute a significant change and would require the publication of a Development Proposal to that effect.

As the system of transfer is unregulated, however, the means and timing of testing administered by the Junior High Schools is a matter for individual Boards of Governors and not one in which my Department can intervene.

I do however want to assure people locally of my continued support and assurance of the continuation of the Dickson Plan system.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education whether he will review the use of schools as polling stations, where community hubs and centres are available.

(AQW 1949/17-22)

Mr Weir: The use of schools as polling stations is governed by Paragraph 22 of Schedule 1 of The Representation of the People Act 1983, which is the responsibility of the NIO.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how child survey results carried out within schools are audited; (ii) what protection exists from later alteration; and (iii) what legislation currently applies to this.

(AQW 1971/17-22)

- (i) Mr Weir: Statisticians in the Department's Analytical Survey Unit (ASU) are responsible for collecting, processing and validating a wide range of data from schools and publishing the results of these data collections in statistical bulletins. These statistics are designated as 'Official Statistics' or 'National Statistics' which means they are produced in compliance with the pillars, principles and practices set out in the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics¹. Compliance with the Code gives users of statistics and citizens confidence that published government statistics are of public value, are high quality and are produced by people and organisations that are worthy of trust.

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority. The OSR provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. They set the standards in the Code of Practice for Statistics that producers of government statistics must meet and they ensure that they uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.

- (ii) As well as complying with the Code of Practice for Statistics, all of the Department's Official and National Statistics are produced and published in accordance with specified Departmental statistical statements and policies. One of these is a Revisions policy which sets out the intention to be open and transparent about any revisions made to Official or National Statistics and to ensure that users of statistics have easy access to comprehensive information about those revisions. The Revisions policy is available at

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revisions%20policy.pdf>

- (iii) The official authority of DE is contained in the legislation referenced below:

The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 Article 37 provides that the Education Authority (EA) (formerly Education and Library Boards) and schools shall make such reports and returns and give such information to the Department as the Department may reasonably require for the purposes of its functions under any statutory provision.

The statutory provisions providing the duties of the Department are contained in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989. Article 3b places a duty on the Department to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and secure the effective execution by EA (former ELBs) and other bodies of the Department's policy in relation to the provision of the education service.

It shall be the duty of the Department -

- (a) to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland;
- (b) to secure the effective execution by boards and other bodies on which or persons on whom powers are conferred or duties imposed under the Education Orders of the Department's policy in relation to the provision of the education service.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to provide (i) a list of all the new primary and post-primary school developments in West Tyrone in the past five years; (ii) the costs associated with each new build; (iii) the new school builds currently under construction; and (iv) proposed new builds to commence in the next 2 years.

(AQW 2014/17-22)

Mr Weir: The new build for Omagh Integrated Primary School was announced to proceed to design in January 2013 for a 14 class base primary school and a nursery unit for up to 26 children. Construction work formally commenced in February 2017 with the school opening in late June 2018. The current overall spend is £7.53m.

Strabane Academy was announced to proceed to design in January 2013 for a new 700 pupil controlled post primary school. The current overall spend to date is £22.7m.

Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh was announced to proceed to design in January 2013 for a 7 class base Irish-Medium primary school and single nursery unit. The current overall spend to date is £790,320.65. Construction is due to commence in summer 2021.

Gaelscoil na gCrann was announced to proceed to design in June 2014 for a 7 class Irish-medium primary school and single nursery unit. The current overall spend to date is £2,275,129.46. The school is due to complete in summer 2020.

1 <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

Loreto College was announced under the School Enhancement Programme in March 2013. This scheme replaced old mobile accommodation which was in a very poor state with new modular buildings which included general classrooms and provision for music. The overall spend was £2,502,844.84. The project completed in March 2016.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what proposals he will bring forward to recognise young carers in the education system.

(AQW 2047/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Children and Young People's Strategy provides the strategic framework for all departments (within the remit of their functions) to improve the well-being of children and young people across eight outcomes. I hope to bring the strategy to the Executive for consideration and adoption shortly. Following the adoption of the strategy, a cross-departmental Delivery Plan will be developed which will set out the actions that departments will take to improve children's well-being and deliver the outcomes in the strategy.

Young carers were identified during consultation on the strategy as a particular group of young people who should be considered an area of greatest focus when departments are determining what actions they intend to take to deliver the strategy. The strategy identifies that children and young people with caring responsibilities may have limited opportunity to have a break from those responsibilities and may also need support to fully undertake their education.

You may also wish to note that the Education Authority (EA), following its participation in the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership group on Young Carers, has developed a guide for schools entitled 'Supporting Young Carers in School: An Introduction for Primary and Secondary School Staff', which may be found on the EA website at <https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/Supporting-Young-Carers-In-Schools-Booklet-Final.pdf>

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to clarify (i) the operation of the Education Welfare Service during non-school periods; (ii) and what support is provided to both parents and children over this period, particularly summer holidays.

(AQW 2049/17-22)

Mr Weir: Education Welfare Services are available throughout the year excluding weekends and statutory holiday periods. All schools are provided with the name and contact details of an Education Welfare Officer who is their key point of contact. Further details about the Education Welfare Service are available on the Education Authority webpage at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/education-welfare-service> and are available during summer holidays to support matters impacting on School Attendance.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW1266/17-22, what are the waiting times for children awaiting a statement of special educational needs, by constituency.

(AQW 2064/17-22)

Mr Weir: The following table outlines the number of children that are currently undergoing the statutory assessment process and shows the number of weeks that children have spent in that process to date.

Statutory assessment is an ongoing process and this information reflects those statutory assessments which have not yet reached a conclusion.

Constituency	Under 26 Weeks	26 - 50 Weeks	Over 50 Weeks	Total
Belfast East	52	37	21	110
Belfast North	93	61	18	172
Belfast South	73	48	23	144
Belfast West	99	70	39	208
East Antrim	50	17	2	69
East Londonderry	54	12	3	69
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	54	15	3	72
Foyle	90	44	13	147
Lagan Valley	51	51	24	126
Mid Ulster	56	30	3	89
Newry and Armagh	58	61	32	151
North Antrim	60	14	2	76
North Down	58	29	22	109
South Antrim	61	17	5	83

Constituency	Under 26 Weeks	26 - 50 Weeks	Over 50 Weeks	Total
South Down	75	55	30	160
Strangford	61	38	21	120
Upper Bann	74	58	16	148
West Tyrone	39	13	3	55

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to clarify (i) the terms and conditions of Education Welfare staff within the Education Authority with regard to term-time; (ii) annual leave; and (iii) what service, if any, operates to assist children in need of support during school closure periods.

(AQW 2142/17-22)

Mr Weir: I would refer the member to my previous response to AQW 1738/17-22, tabled by Doug Beattie MLA, published in the Official Report on 18 February 2020.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1637/17-22, to detail the names of each of the school's governors and in which capacity they have been appointed.

(AQW 2181/17-22)

Mr Weir: The names of the school governors of Bleary Primary School, Co. Armagh and the capacity in which they were appointed are as follows:

Transferor representatives:

- Rev G Haugh
- Mrs Elizabeth Harrison
- Mr Alastair Hewitt
- Mr Kenneth Milligan

Parent representatives:

- Mrs Stephanie Cardwell
- Dr Alison Blair

Education Authority representatives:

- Mrs Dorothy Collen
- Mrs Catherine Frizzell

Teacher representative:

- Mrs Joy Wilson

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for King's Park Primary School, Lurgan.
(AQW 2185/17-22)

Mr Weir: An Integrated Consultant Team (ICT), Doran Consulting Ltd, was appointed on 1 October 2019 to lead in the school design and manage the scheme from cradle to grave. The Team is currently undertaking the requisite consultations and surveys in order to finalise a technical feasibility report which examines a number of viable options.

This study will be used to inform the development of a robust business case weighing up the benefits, risks and costs of each option to identify the preferred option.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education what additional support his Department will provide to children and families who are struggling to pay for (i) school uniform; (ii) school transport; (iii) books; (iv) voluntary contributions to schools; and (v) school meals.

(AQW 2199/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department offers financial assistance to families and children most in need through a number of initiatives.

(i) School Uniform

School uniform grant provides assistance towards the cost of a school uniform to those families most in need. The value of the grant is £35.75 for a primary school pupil; £51 for a post-primary/special school pupil under 15 years old; £56 for a post-primary/special school pupil over 15 years old; and £22 for a post-primary/special school pupil's physical education kit.

(ii) School Transport

If a pupil does not have a grant-aided school in their chosen category within a distance from their home that is capable of being walked, they will be eligible for free home to school transport to their chosen school. Home to school transport provision

will also be provided free of charge to pupils if they have a transport requirement identified within a statement of special educational needs.

(iii) Books

The provision of books and other curricular resources in schools for use by pupils is a matter for individual schools.

(iv) Voluntary contributions to schools

Grant aided schools are entitled to request or invite voluntary contributions from parents for the benefit of pupils. However, the law requires that any such request must make it clear that: a) there is no obligation on parents to make a voluntary contribution; and b) no pupil, whose parents have not paid the contribution, can be treated differently to other pupils.

(v) School meals

My Department is committed to providing free school meals to children and young people most in need. The value of a free school meal to low income families is estimated at around £460 to £520 per annum per child based on the price of a school meal if the child was required to pay for this. The 2018/19 School Meals Census reported that 99,142 pupils (29.3% of total school enrolment) were entitled to free school meals.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education how many vacancies currently exist in the Children's Welfare office.
(AQW 2203/17-22)

Mr Weir: There are currently 4.6 (full time equivalent) vacancies for Education Welfare Officers in the Education Welfare Service.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education how the additional £10m allocated to address pressures in his Department will be spent.
(AQW 2237/17-22)

Mr Weir: The additional allocation of £10m will assist in addressing existing in-year pressures within the education sector as follows:

- Special Educational Needs - £0.9m;
- EU Exit costs within the Education Authority - £1.3m; and
- other existing inescapable pressures within the Education Authority -£7.8m.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education, in terms of response times, what standards does the Education Authority operate to when dealing with correspondence and enquires from MLAs.
(AQW 2258/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority aims to respond to all correspondence and enquiries within 10 working days. If more time is required to respond, the elected Member will be informed and given an anticipated response time.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many individuals holding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) are now employed as classroom assistants across all schools; and (ii) at what schools are these individuals employed.
(AQW 2276/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that it does not hold this information.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education has the Education Authority compiled and published information pursuant to Section 3 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.
(AQW 2290/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has compiled information pursuant to Section 3 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for the 2018-2019 financial year. The EA Annual Report and Accounts 2018-2019 will be published when the NI Audit Office issues its final audit certificate.

The Education Authority publishes information on Rural Needs and Assessments on the EA website, to complement the requirements of Section 3 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, which can be found at <https://www.eani.org.uk/about-us/equality/rural-needs>

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs also publish a Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report. The 2018-2019 report, which includes information of the Education Authority activity can be found at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/rural-needs-annual-monitoring-report-1-april-2018-31-march-2019.PDF>

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how many school nurture units are there in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 2354/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department currently provides funding for 31 Nurture Groups in primary schools.

I understand from the Education Authority that a further 19 primary schools have self-funded nurture groups of which 3 offer full-time places and 16 offer part-time places. Nurture groups have also been established on a full-time basis by 3 special schools.

The Education Authority has supported 6 post primary schools with the development of nurture provision based on the established principles of nurture group provision.

I will be considering the future of the Nurture Programme in schools in due course, including the option of extending provision.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how his Department is fulfilling its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.

(AQW 2355/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department takes very seriously its duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.

In delivering this duty my Department seeks to respond positively to parental demand for integrated provision and works to meet the needs of the sector in a range of areas, for example in considering home to school transport requirements and school requests for temporary variations to their admissions and/or enrolment numbers.

Additionally, a range of bespoke, sector specific investment is provided to support the development of integrated education. This includes annual funding support and ongoing business planning support to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; support to transforming schools; and, significant capital investment via the Fresh Start Agreement.

My Department also requires its Non-Departmental Public Bodies to support the delivery of this statutory duty.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education why there is no buildings handbook for special schools.

(AQW 2356/17-22)

Mr Weir: While there is not a specific Building Handbook for Special Schools in Northern Ireland, the Department uses the UK Department of Education Building Bulletin 102 – “Designing for Disabled Children and Children with Special Educational Needs (Guidance for mainstream and special schools)” in planning and designing accommodation.

This bulletin serves as the briefing document for planning building projects for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in mainstream schools; resourced provision and designated units within mainstream schools; special schools; as well as outreach, support and training accommodation.

The design of special schools requires consideration of a range of sometimes complex accommodation requirements which is not best served by an overly prescriptive schedule of accommodation. In practice special schools are bespoke designs which are arrived at following full stakeholder involvement.

Although consideration had been given by DE to developing a DE Special Educational Needs Handbook it was concluded that, given the relatively small number of special schools and the wide range of differing needs of this group of children, it was not the best use of resources to invest in producing a Handbook that would be unlikely to better the content of Building Bulletin 102.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to review and reform nurture units, with a view to potential expansion and better integration and pathways into the schools system.

(AQW 2358/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department currently provides funding for 31 Nurture Groups (NGs). In my previous tenure as Education Minister, I gave a commitment that the Department would continue to fund these particular groups until a decision on a new Nurture Programme was made. This remains the position.

The Department commissioned Queens University, Belfast to undertake an evaluation report on the impacts and cost effectiveness of the 31 NGs funded by DE. The report demonstrated clear evidence that NGs are a successful intervention to support the needs of children with particular social and emotional needs.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Nurture%20QUB%20Full%20Evaluation%20Report%20.pdf>

These positive findings were also reflected in a separate qualitative evaluation carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-nurture-unit-signature-project-pilot_0.PDF

To assist in the integration of the nurturing approach into the schools system the EA commenced a capacity building programme “Whole School Nurturing Approaches (WSNA)” in September 2018, which is open to all primary schools. This programme involves awareness and support for school staff on Nurturing Approaches, leading to more targeted training on Attachment, Resilience, and Nurturing Principles and Practice.

I will be considering the future of the Nurture Programme in schools in due course, including the option of extending provision.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what timescale he envisages would be necessary to introduce a Childcare Act, to ensure 30-hour childcare provision.

(AQW 2359/17-22)

Mr Weir: I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration in due course. The Strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation undertaken in 2015, the policy priorities set by the Executive and the extended early education and care services available in other jurisdictions.

There are significant policy and resourcing issues to be decided in order to finalise the Strategy, including delivering an extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care offer for families with children aged 3 to 4.

Publication of the Strategy, including any proposed legislation, requires the Executive's consideration of the budget and resources available to deliver all the actions. Progressing to publication, to include an extended offer, is predicated on securing the resources required.

As childcare is cross-cutting, actions aimed at promoting parental employment and improving child development requires collaboration across a number of departments and their agencies. My officials have worked closely with colleagues in relevant departments to revise the Strategy and associated actions, including through the cross-departmental Childcare Strategy Programme Board. Following the Executive's consideration, implementation of the agreed strategic actions will be monitored by the Programme Board.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what proposals his Department has to bring forward a childcare strategy during the 2020/21 financial year.

(AQW 2360/17-22)

Mr Weir: I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration in due course. The Strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation undertaken in 2015, the policy priorities set by the Executive and the extended early education and care services available in other jurisdictions.

There are significant policy and resourcing issues to be decided in order to finalise the Strategy, including delivering an extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care offer for families with children aged 3 to 4.

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Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's plans for working with other Departments on cross-cutting issues around childcare.

(AQW 2361/17-22)

Mr Weir: I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration in due course. The Strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation undertaken in 2015, the policy priorities set by the Executive and the extended early education and care services available in other jurisdictions.

There are significant policy and resourcing issues to be decided in order to finalise the Strategy, including delivering an extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care offer for families with children aged 3 to 4.

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Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the £1 million required by his Department for exiting the European Union.

(AQW 2384/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department received an additional allocation of £10m following January Monitoring. Of this, £1.3m has been allocated to the Education Authority (EA) for existing in-year pressures associated with exiting the European Union (EU). A breakdown of these pressures is as follows: £1.1m for increased costs from fluctuations in the currency market arising from the uncertainty of an orderly EU exit; and £0.2m relating to the EA's Operations Centre, set up to plan for exiting the EU.

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Education whether he will explore the possibility of increasing the availability of the Lost Lives book in local schools.

(AQW 2387/17-22)

Mr Weir: The curriculum gives teachers and schools the flexibility to deliver tailored lessons to meet the needs of the pupils in the classroom. It is a matter for individual schools, using their delegated budget, to choose the resources, materials and textbooks they use to support their teaching. It is also up to schools to determine their provision within school libraries, including the availability of the Lost Lives book to pupils.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1933/17-22, are there any faith-based or other schools in the West Tyrone constituency not included in the table provided.

(AQW 2405/17-22)

Mr Weir: The answer to AQW 1933/17-22 contained primary and post primary schools only. There are also two special schools, one independent and one nursery school in the West Tyrone Constituency. Their enrolment information can be found in the table below.

School Name	Academic Year		
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Arvalee School & Resource Centre	142	142	146
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	118	122	128
Kilskeery Independent Christian School	17	16	13
Omagh North Nursery School	78	77	78

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1735/17-22, how many of the 23 primary schools and 7 post-primary schools are (i) from the controlled sector; and (ii) from the maintained sector.

(AQW 2427/17-22)

Mr Weir: Pursuant to AQW 1735/17-22, the table below provides a breakdown of (i) schools from the controlled sector and (ii) schools from the maintained sector that are in deficit at 1 April 2019 in Upper Bann:

School Phase	Controlled Sector	Maintained Sector	Total Number of schools in deficit in Upper Bann as at 1 April 2019
Primary	12	11	23
Post-primary	5	2	7

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding per pupil in the integrated sector.

(AQW 2448/17-22)

Mr Weir: The level of funding per pupil in 2019-20, distributed through the Common Funding Formula (CFF) in the integrated sector, is reflected in the table below.

Sector	2019-20 Per Pupil Funding through the CFF* £
Grant-maintained integrated (GMI)**	4,152
Controlled integrated	3,669

* Data source: CFF 2019-20, which included funding to mitigate the increase in Teachers' Employer's Superannuation costs effective from 1 April 2019.

** Funding provided to GMI schools through the CFF will be higher than that for Controlled Integrated schools, as the former includes funding for Administration Costs and Landlord Maintenance, the costs of which are met by the Education Authority for all controlled schools.

The Department is unable to disaggregate all funding (i.e. funding outside of the CFF) on a per pupil basis.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, in regard to his appointment of a special adviser (i) whether he independently chose his special adviser or an allocation was made by his party; (ii) how it was made known, and to whom, that he was seeking to appoint a special adviser; (iii) whether a pool of candidates was considered; (iv) if so, how many were within the pool; (v) how any pool of candidates was assembled; (vi) what were the essential and desirable criteria set for the job;

(vii) by what process was the choice made; (viii) what notes and records were made and kept of the process; (ix) how fair employment obligations were met; (x) on what date(s) was the job offered and accepted; (xi) what was the contractual start date; and (xii) was the range of available salary discussed with the appointee, or was the job offered and accepted without knowledge of the likely salary.

(AQW 2510/17-22)

Mr Weir: The appointment of my Special Adviser followed the requirements set out in the Code for the Appointment of Special Advisers agreed by the Executive and published by the Department of Finance on 20 January. Salary details were confirmed to me by the Department of Finance on 14 February. Peter Martin was appointed on 17 February.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail all spend on substitute teachers by schools, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2578/17-22)

Mr Weir: The cost of teacher substitution in the last three years is given in the table below.

Financial Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Spend (£)	73,594,464.09	69,008,102.01	69,175,217.23

Source: Teacher vacancies, sickness absence and substitution statistics in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland, 2018/19.

Notes:

- 1 Figures supplied are in financial years i.e. April to March.
- 2 Figures exclude voluntary grammar schools.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made to increase Cedar Lodge Special School's provision to include pupils aged 3–19 by September 2020.

(AQW 2587/17-22)

Mr Weir: The current Education Authority (EA) action plan, covering the period April 2019 to March 2021, includes an action which commits the EA to consult on changing provision at this school to include pupils aged 3–19 and those with more significant and/or complex needs by September 2020.

This consultation will form part of a regional approach to reconfiguring special schools and pupil support provision at mainstream schools within a common structure where the special educational needs of pupils aged 3-19 can be met.

The changes proposed by the EA will be decided upon in response to the publication of Development Proposals following the completion of pre-publication consultation.

I am informed by the Education Authority that it plans to engage with Cedar Lodge School this academic year to explore the potential of the extension of provision to include pre-school and post 16 within the area planning framework. Early discussions are planned with the Board of Governors to discuss interim pre-school arrangements in place for September 2020 to meet regionally assessed need.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of school infrastructure in North Down.

(AQO 198/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department has invested in improvement and maintenance works to maintain the schools estate in a safe and serviceable condition. This financial year, the budget for minor works improvements is in excess of £83 million.

In January 2020, I announced three schools from the North Down constituency under the third tranche of projects to advance in design under the second call to the School Enhancement Programme (SEP2), namely:

- Glenraig Controlled Integrated Primary School
- Kilcooley Primary School
- Sullivan Upper School, Holywood

A SEP2 project at St Columbanus' College was also announced in January 2019 and Departmental officials are currently working with the school to agree the scope of the proposed project.

Major Capital Investment is planned for Crawfordsburn Primary School, Bangor Central Integrated Primary School and Priory Integrated College.

However, despite the increasing investment in capital projects, significant demand for further improvement remains. The implementation of further major works and SEP's over the next five years will therefore be an important element of improving the overall health of the estate in the medium and longer term.

My Department will continue to bid for additional capital budget and invest all of the funding allocated.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what action he has taken to progress the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh.

(AQO 199/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Strule Programme is a pioneering project and a massive capital investment in the delivery of education in the region. It is a longstanding Executive priority.

The next stage of construction has been delayed due to tendering issues and the need for business case re-approval. The Department has completed a fundamental review of the construction programme, and I will be giving this my urgent consideration.

In light of the procurement delay provisional opening of the Campus is planned for September 2024 at the earliest. This is dependent on works commencing on site by May 2021 at the latest.

All other work on the Programme, including construction and non-construction projects, is continuing uninterrupted.

This includes the delivery of a range of shared education initiatives which are being developed and led by the schools themselves. This will ensure that today's students have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of sharing, and play an important role in shaping future education delivery both locally and regionally.

Site preparation works are now complete and the Strathroy Link Road opened in November 2019.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to expand the capacity at Coláiste Feirste, to address increasing demand for Irish-medium post-primary education.

(AQO 200/17-22)

Mr Weir: On 23 January 2020 the Education Authority published Development Proposal 590 on behalf of the Board of Governors of Coláiste Feirste. This proposes an increase in the school's approved admissions and enrolment numbers in order to meet assessed demand for post-primary Irish-medium education. DP 590 is supported by a Case for Change, published on the Department's website.

Expressions of support or opposition to this DP may be sent to the Department until 23 March 2020. Thereafter officials within my Department will collate all pertinent evidence to inform my decision. Until I see that evidence I will not be expressing a view on whether the DP should be approved.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the progress made by schools that have transformed or are in the process of transformation to integrated status.

(AQO 201/17-22)

Mr Weir: There are currently 65 integrated schools in Northern Ireland. To date 25 schools have, in accordance with the relevant legislation, successfully transformed to integrated status. A further 9 schools have begun the legal process to transform to an integrated school, which requires a ballot of parents to determine the level of support for transformation. Of those 9 schools, 7 have held a successful Parental Ballot in favour of transformation to integrated status and the remaining 2 are in the process of arranging a Parental Ballot.

All 25 schools that have transformed have legally transformed to acquire Controlled Integrated status.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Childcare Strategy.

(AQO 202/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Childcare Strategy aims to promote parental employment and improve child development. The range of actions necessary to deliver these dual aims requires Executive approval.

I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration in due course. The revised Strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation undertaken in 2015, advances in childcare across other jurisdictions and the policy priorities for supporting families reaffirmed in 'New Decade, New Approach'. This includes developing arrangements to deliver, extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care provision for families with children aged 3-4.

There are some key policy and resourcing decisions needed before the Strategy can be published. I will be considering the proposed scope of an extended offer, including potential options for implementing a combination of funded pre-school education and childcare hours. I will also be considering any eligibility requirements as well as assessing the level of additional investment required.

In addition to an extended offer for 3-4 year olds, the Strategy has wider aspirations for childcare services for children aged 0-14. I plan to meet with a range of early education and childcare stakeholders in relation to progressing this important issue. I want to stress however, that progressing to publication of the Strategy, to include an extended offer, is predicated on securing the resources required.

I hope to be in a position to set out a definitive timescale for publication following the Executive's consideration of the budget and resources available to deliver all the actions.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Education whether he will review the Pre-School provision admissions criteria, with the view to helping working parents.

(AQO 203/17-22)

Mr Weir: I appreciate the pressures which working parents face, particularly those on lower incomes and I am keen to do all that I can to support them.

Pre-school education, whilst non-compulsory, is an important phase of early education, and as such, my Department makes a funded pre-school education place available for every child in their pre-school year whose parents want it.

All admissions criteria are set by pre-school providers, taking into account guidance provided by the Department however legislation requires that the top criterion for each provider prioritises children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to outline the action he is taking to increase the provision of mental health services in schools.

(AQO 204/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department is working collaboratively with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency, the Health and Social Care Board and the Education Authority, to develop an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework that will aim to enhance support for children and young people. The emphasis will be on promotion, prevention and early intervention, including how services can be augmented to support schools, and their pupils.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the area planning recommendations for Irish-medium primary provision in Foyle, as submitted by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta in April 2019.

(AQO 205/17-22)

Mr Weir: The report by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta published in January 2019 sets a plan for the future of Irish Medium education in Londonderry. Its principal recommendation is that there should be no change in terms of the configuration of Irish Medium education in the city.

On this basis, the Department assumes that no further area planning changes are now anticipated that would affect the three existing schools, who will now be considered in the normal manner as part of any assessment process for future capital development.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQO 66/17-22, to outline what progress has been made in securing flexibility in respect of the funding to support shared education committed to in the Fresh Start Agreement.

(AQO 206/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) set out a commitment by the UK Government (UKG) to release up to £500m over 10 years (£50m per year) of new capital funding to support shared and integrated education and housing, subject to individual projects being agreed between the Executive and the UKG.

Carry forward of unspent funding for 2016-17 and 2017-18 up to the end of the 2020-21 financial year was previously agreed by Her Majesty's Treasury under the Confidence and Supply Agreement.

The New Decade, New Approach Agreement – Next Steps includes a commitment by the UK Government for financial flexibility to re-profile funding provided as part of the Fresh Start Agreement for shared and integrated education and housing. My Department's officials are now engaged with Department of Finance officials in clarifying the detail behind this commitment.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Education what assurance he can give that the level of funding available for cross-border shared education projects will be maintained.

(AQO 207/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Peace IV Programme currently provides funding for Shared Education partnerships within Northern Ireland, within the border counties of Ireland, and cross-border. This funding will continue until the end of the 2021-22 academic year, i.e. June 2022.

The Special EU Programmes Body is currently leading on development of the cross-border PEACE Plus Programme, for the 2021-2027 period, with input from Government Departments (North and South) and other stakeholders. A proposal for Shared Education is under consideration for inclusion in the programme.

Department of Finance

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.

(AQW 1918/17-22)

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): An Executive sub-committee on EU Exit issues has been established and within that my Department leads on Future Policy and Finance issues. This work includes working with other departments to understand the financial implications of ensuring compliance with the Protocol. I have written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury outlining the requirement for funding to be provided to cover the costs of managing and administering the Protocol.

No members of DoF staff are currently engaged directly on ensuring compliance with the Protocol. A number of people in my department are engaged in assisting other departments in their work on the Protocol, including the provision of staff, legal advice and budgetary cover.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance (i) how the level of public borrowing by the Executive in May 2007 compares with the current level of borrowing; (ii) how much has been repaid in each year; and (iii) how much interest has been paid on the loans.

(AQW 1975/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The total level of public borrowing as at 3 February 2020 is £1,774million this compares to a figure of £1,611million at 1 April 2007². This represents an increase of £163million.

The amount of principal which has been repaid each year is set out in Annex A.

The total amount of interest paid during the period from 2007-08 and 3 February 2020 is £1,075million the detail of which can be found in Annex A.

This includes borrowing by the Northern Ireland Executive under the Reinvestment the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and local schools. There are also some elements of historic borrowing relating to Ulster Savings Certificates and Ulster Development Bonds.

Analysis of Public Debt, Interest Paid and Principal Repaid

ANNEX A

£000	Opening Position 1 April 2007	2007- 08	2008- 09	2009- 10	2010-11	2011- 12	2012- 13	2013- 14	2014- 15	2015- 16	2016- 17	2017- 18	2018- 19	At 3 February 2020
Public Debt	1,610,523	1,591,291	1,487,844	1,481,221	1,404,254	1,670,584	1,697,944	1,766,651	1,892,734	2,051,605	2,117,564	1,998,132	1,912,944	1,774,348
Interest Paid		114,421	106,385	97,924	91,237	85,736	84,297	79,276	76,717	75,468	73,395	68,793	63,313	58,530
Principal Repaid		116,837	120,047	119,726	113,867	108,670	123,576	127,228	133,160	135,404	147,752	152,966	151,930	146,010

Source: Information has been taken from the Public Income and Expenditure Accounts

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance what discussions he has had with Executive colleagues regarding the removal or adjustment of the maximum capital valuation for domestic properties when calculating rates.

(AQO 189/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I have not yet discussed this issue with my Executive colleagues. This particular matter was part of the wider 'Rates Rethink' Consultation undertaken by my predecessor in 2016/17. I am currently considering the results of that earlier consultation in tandem with the responses received to the recent Business Rates Consultation, in order to establish the options available to the Executive in terms of short, medium and long term policy objectives.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance whether his Budget will include financial contributions to the Derry and Strabane City Deal.

(AQO 185/17-22)

Mr Murphy: City Deals are based on the premise that the funding provided by the British Government will be matched by Devolved Administrations. However, it is for the Executive to agree to the concept and match funding for City and Growth Deals.

The Inclusive Future Fund is separate to City Deals and does not have the same assumption on match funding. The decision to provide match funding for the Inclusive Futures Fund lies with the Executive.

I will shortly be taking both these matters to the Executive.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the match funding of both the City Deal and the Inclusive Futures Fund for Derry and Strabane.

² Figures have been provided at 1 April 2007 based on the published balance sheet information available.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance whether he will be engaging with the Irish Government to agree further areas of cross-border funding priorities, in addition to those set out in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQO 186/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In the New Decade, New Approach document, the Irish Government committed to working with the Executive through the North South Ministerial Council, to help deliver projects that will benefit people across the island, in range of areas.

The document also set out a broad range of cross-border priorities that will require funding.

Unfortunately it is now clear that there is not sufficient funding to do everything we aspire to do and I intend to have further engagement with the Treasury on the way forward.

Engagement with the Irish Government on further areas of cross-border funding will take place through the North South Ministerial council which I hope will be established as soon as possible.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister of Finance whether the increased allocation of funding to Departments, announced in the January monitoring round, was ring-fenced to meet specific pressures or priorities.

(AQO 188/17-22)

Mr Murphy: All allocations announced in monitoring rounds are in response to bids for additional resources from departments.

As a bid is for a specific purpose or pressure, and assessed as such in the monitoring round, any allocation I announce is therefore ring-fenced.

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the progress on the establishment of a fiscal council as outlined in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQO 187/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My officials are currently examining the options for establishing a Fiscal Council, what its specific terms of reference might be, and how it is appointed.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Finance how he will ensure that the PSNI will receive its 2.5 per cent pay rise.

(AQO 190/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I approved the 2019/20 PSNI pay remit on 17th February which fulfils my role in the matter.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Finance whether he intends to review the role of procurement in ensuring that large capital projects are delivered on time and within budget.

(AQO 191/17-22)

Mr Murphy: I am aware of the finding of the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on Major Capital Projects.

The Procurement Board, which I chair, will next meet on 1 April 2020. I intend, to have the NIAO Report discussed and direct the Procurement Board to commence a review of the role of procurement in delivering major capital projects.

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Finance what plans are in place to provide match funding for the Derry and Strabane City Deal and Inclusive Future Fund.

(AQO 192/17-22)

Mr Murphy: City Deals are based on the premise that the funding provide by British Government will be matched by Devolved Administrations. However, it the Executive to agree for the concept and the match funding for City and Growth Deals.

The Inclusive Future Fund is separate to City Deals and does not have the same assumption on match funding. The decision to provide match funding for the Inclusive Futures Fund lies with the Executive.

I will shortly be taking both these matters to the Executive.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the match funding of both the City Deal and the Inclusive Futures Fund for Derry and Strabane.

Department of Health

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health the number of residents of the Republic of Ireland who have been provided medical treatment in Northern Ireland NHS facilities in each of the last five years and the cost thereof.

(AQW 703/17-22)

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): This information is not available, as residents of the Republic of Ireland can access needs arising healthcare when visiting Northern Ireland. This facility is provided under the Common Travel Area.

The UK and RoI currently use a formula to calculate a reimbursement amount. The process is managed by the National Health Service Business Services Authority on behalf of the whole of the UK.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health the amount recovered from Irish authorities on an annual basis in respect of medical treatment provided to residents of the Republic of Ireland, for each of the last five years.

(AQW 705/17-22)

Mr Swann: In Northern Ireland the only treatment route under which the Health and Social Care Trusts recover costs directly from Irish authorities is for medical treatment provided to residents of the Republic of Ireland as a result of contractual arrangements or service level agreements. The total amount recovered in each of the last five years is shown below.

The administration and recovery of costs associated with other treatment routes available to residents of the Republic of Ireland ie the EHIC, S1 and S2 schemes are centrally managed between the British and Irish governments on a country to country basis under EU legislation.

	Amount received (£)
2014/2015	1,576,755
2015/2016	2,107,273
2016/2017	2,644,006
2017/2018	5,135,485
2018/2019	4,660,787

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how he will help implement Unison's Safer Hospital campaign.

(AQW 825/17-22)

Mr Swann: As set out in the New Decade, New Approach deal, the Executive has agreed to deliver an extra 900 nursing and midwifery undergraduate places over three years and my Department is committed to sustained continued investment in growing the NI nursing and midwifery workforce.

The deal also sets out a commitment that the Executive will reconfigure hospital provision to deliver better patient outcomes, more stable services and sustainable staffing.

I and my officials continue to meet with Unison and other Trade Unions to discuss staffing and will continue to work in partnership with Trade Unions, including through the Strategic Health and Social Care Partnership Forum.

Officials from my Department's Workforce Policy Directorate will lead on developing the case for safe staffing legislation and will establish a working group, comprising Chief Professional Officers and other relevant stakeholders. The first meeting of this will be take place before the end of February.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health how he will ensure the supply of cross-border prescription drugs following Brexit.
(AQW 1316/17-22)

Mr Swann: Maintaining the supply of medicines to Northern Ireland following the UK's exit from the European Union is a priority for my Department and there is an ongoing focus on this work.

My officials engage on a regular basis with local stakeholders involved in the medicines supply chain as well as with the Department of Health and Social Care, who lead on medicines supply issues for the UK, and with the other Devolved Administrations. The aim is to ensure that sufficient medicines are available for patients and that arrangements are in place for the transit of supplies from Great Britain and cross border from the Republic of Ireland.

In addition, well established arrangements are in place to respond to any supply disruptions that might arise to ensure that patients continue to get the medicines they need.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health whether his Department provides any funding for treatment of problem gambling.
(AQW 1407/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Department does not provide earmarked funding for treatment of problem gambling. However, where problem gambling causes mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression, appropriate help and support is provided in line with clinical need and current service provision for mental health.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Health what services are commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board to help people suffering from gambling addiction.

(AQW 1483/17-22)

Mr Swann: At the present time there are no gambling specific services commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board in Northern Ireland. Where problem gambling causes mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression, appropriate help and support is provided in line with clinical need and current service provision for mental health. This includes general Community Addictions teams within each Trust area which provide general assistance for those who suffer from all addictions.

Further support is also available in the community and voluntary sector.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Health (i) to detail the time it takes from when a child is diagnosed with autism until they receive a social worker; (ii) how many children with such a diagnosis are awaiting a social worker; and (iii) when these children will be allocated a social worker.

(AQW 1529/17-22)

Mr Swann: Not all children with an autism diagnosis will require a social worker.

The number of children with an autism diagnosis awaiting a social worker varies from Trust to Trust. Allocation is based upon priority of each case with careful consideration given to balancing risk, need, demands of the service and capacity.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the revenue raising streams employed by his Department, and the amount raised, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1752/17-22)

Mr Swann: There were no revenue raising streams employed by the Department of Health in each of the last three years. However my Department has employed cost controls and low impact savings measures across the HSC system over a number of years, in managing its resources.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health for an update on plans for a new emergency department in Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 1754/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Western Health and Social Care Trust is currently developing business case proposals for the next phase of the Altnagelvin Strategic Redevelopment. These proposals will include, amongst other key infrastructural elements, plans for the refurbishment and expansion of the current Altnagelvin Emergency Department facilities. The business case is in the final stages of development and when complete will be subject to Trust Board approval before submission to the Department of Health for consideration. Progress on the proposals will be dependent upon Departmental approval and the availability of capital funding.

In parallel to the above the Trust is committed to progressing interim minor capital works to alleviate current pressures within the Emergency Department.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) how many times, in the last three years, has a consultant undertaken remunerated private clinical work using Health and Social Care Trust facilities and personnel, whether for the independent sector, or for another party; and (ii) how much each Trust received from such work in the last three financial years.

(AQW 1755/17-22)

Mr Swann: The table below provides details of consultants' private practice work using HSC facilities, and the associated income from this work:

Trust	Year	Activity count	Value billed £
Northern Trust	2019/20 (10 months)	862	96,000
	2018/19	1,218	149,000
	2017/18	1,646	207,000
Southern Trust*	2019/20 (10 months)	2	3,000
	2018/19	6	4,000
	2017/18	5	350
Western Trust	2019/20 (10 months)	1340	188,000
	2018/19	1500	291,000
	2017/18	1646	360,000
S Eastern Trust	2019/20 (10 months)	116	41,000
	2018/19	218	129,000
	2017/18	197	46,000
Belfast Trust	2019/20 (10 months)	842	500,000
	2018/19	1,401	1,761,275
	2017/18	1,336	1,844,254

Source: Information has been supplied by HSC Trusts.

- * Southern Trust have advised that no Independent Sector work is undertaken at SHSCT facilities. The only private patient work that is permitted to be undertaken is for Outpatient appointments only.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the air ambulance service.
(AQW 1780/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) has been a major benefit to people whose lives are at risk following significant trauma.

HEMS operates a doctor/paramedic model, 7 days per week, 12 hours per day and attends some of the most traumatic medical incidents across the province. The helicopter can reach anywhere in Northern Ireland within 25-30 minutes and this rapid response is vital in an emergency situation.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the money spent on mental health services in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 1813/17-22)

Mr Swann: I refer to the answer provided to AQW 1660/17-22.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health what assessment he has made of the number of additional GPs required.
(AQW 1814/17-22)

Mr Swann: A General Practitioner (GP) Medical Workforce Review led by the Public Health Agency was published in June 2015.

In line with the recommendations of that Workforce Review, the number of GP training places commissioned annually by my Department has been increased by 71%, from 65 in 2015 to 111 in 2019.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) total amount of additional funding for reducing waiting times; and (ii) planned spend in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 1815/17-22)

Mr Swann: Additional funding to tackle waiting lists has not yet been confirmed. The amount of investment for each Trust will be agreed based on the funding envelope and capacity available at a local level.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for an update on the e-Safety strategy.
(AQW 1820/17-22)

Mr Swann: I refer you to my answer to AQW 500/17-22.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the average waiting time for (i) colonoscopy procedures; and (ii) urgent referrals for colonoscopy procedures, in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 1822/17-22)

Mr Swann: The latest provisional average completed waits, relating to quarter ending September 2019, for colonoscopies procedures for each trust are given in the table below. These completed waits provide the time waited from the decision to admit to the procedure taking place. These completed waits do not take account of any suspensions from the waiting list. It should also be noted that patients who are admitted non-electively do not have a date waiting. Only elective surgeries are included.

Average number of weeks waited for colonoscopies taking place in HSC hospitals during quarter ending September 2019.

	Trust Provider	Trust of Residence
Belfast	35.9	30.9
Northern	22.0	28.4
South Eastern	22.4	24.8
Southern	28.0	28.9
Western	25.0	25.0
N. Ireland	27.0	

Information on routine and urgent referrals is not normally collected.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health what the funding uplift for General Practice will be in the financial year 2020/21, compared to 2019/20.

(AQW 1828/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care budget for 2020/21 is still to be determined. No decisions have therefore been made on investment in General Practice for 2020/21.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health to outline the timescale under which reforms will be made to the call handling system for emergency calls to the Ambulance Service.

(AQW 1829/17-22)

Mr Swann: In March 2019 the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) published its consultation and equality impact assessment report on the proposal to implement a new Clinical Response Model (CRM) for NIAS.

The NIAS new CRM revolves around: identifying the sickest, quickest; getting to the sickest, quickest; sending the right resource, first time; and providing the best patient care.

Under the new CRM, NIAS have replaced the previous emergency call categories with evidence-based categorisation of emergency calls, in line with the rest of the UK.

In August 2019, my Department approved the introduction of the code sets and standards that would apply the new categorisation to NIAS emergency calls. NIAS successfully introduced these new code sets and standards on 12 November 2019.

The introduction of the new code has already improved the response times to immediately life threatening calls.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health how long, on average, emergency calls are on hold before being connected to the Ambulance Service; and how this time will be altered by the proposed reform of the Ambulance Service.

(AQW 1830/17-22)

Mr Swann: Emergency 999 calls are initially answered by the Public Emergency Call Service operated by British Telecommunications plc. The call is then connected to NIAS Emergency Ambulance Control (EAC).

EAC aims to answer 999 calls as quickly as possible and has a target of 90% of all emergency calls answered within 5 seconds. The call answer performance in the year to date (April 2019 to January 2020) is 76% of 999 calls being answered within 5 seconds. For the same period, where the call was delayed in being answered, the average time was 14 seconds.

Where an unplanned volume of calls or other unplanned disruption occurs, contingency arrangements are in place to manage these events until normal call handling services are restored.

NIAS is currently undertaking a number of service improvements, including to increase the number of emergency call handlers and a review of shift patterns to maximise staffing levels especially at peak times.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health for an update on reform of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service as part of the ongoing transformation process.

(AQW 1831/17-22)

Mr Swann: Following an extensive demand and capacity review of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) services a new Clinical Response Model (CRM) was developed. A public consultation on the introduction of the proposed new CRM, which included a full equality impact assessment, concluded in January 2019. The final proposal, which takes account of the outcomes of the consultation, can be found on the NIAS website.

NIAS successfully implemented the codes sets and standards that introduced evidence-based categorisation of emergency calls, in line with the rest of the UK, on 12 November 2019.

The introduction of the new code has already improved the response times to immediately life threatening calls.

NIAS is currently developing detailed plans for the implementation of the new CRM which will require significant investment in staff and resources.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health for an update on securing insulin and associated equipment and supplies for use by people with diabetes after 31 December 2020.

(AQW 1832/17-22)

Mr Swann: Maintaining the supply of medicines to Northern Ireland following the UK's exit from the European Union is a priority for my Department. My officials are engaging on a regular basis with local stakeholders involved in the medicines supply chain as well as with the Department of Health and Social Care, who lead on medicines supply issues for the UK, and with the other Devolved Administrations.

The aim is to ensure that sufficient medicines and other healthcare supplies, including insulin, continue to be available for patients in the period leading up to and after 31 December 2020. Well established arrangements are also in place to respond to any supply disruptions that might arise to ensure that patients continue to get the medicines they need.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health to detail the latest available waiting times for opiate substitution therapy in each Health and Social Trust.

(AQW 1834/17-22)

Mr Swann: Please find information detailed below.

Table 1. Waiting times for opiate substitution therapy by Health and Social Care Trust as at 31 December 2019

HSC Trust	0-3 Wks (0-21 days)	>3-6 Wks (22-42 days)	>6-9 Wks (43-63 days)	>9 wks (64+ days)	Total Waiting
Belfast	6	8	9	18	41
Northern	2	0	0	0	2
South Eastern	0	0	1	0	1
Southern	1	0	0	0	1
Western	4	6	0	0	10
Prison	1	3	3	31	38

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of further areas identified for action in the mid-term strategy review of Breastfeeding - A Great Start.

(AQW 1835/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department's Breastfeeding Strategy (2013-2023) aims to improve the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies through breastfeeding. In keeping with the Strategy, the Public Health Agency has developed breastfeeding promotional material which is distributed to expectant mothers through HSC maternity services. A website www.breastfedbabies.org provides further information and support. Specific training is also provided for health professionals to promote and support breastfeeding.

The UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) promotes breastfeeding. Recently the north of Ireland became the first region across Britain and Ireland to achieve 100% of births in a BFI fully accredited maternity service.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on the development of a Child Death Overview Panel, following on from Recommendation 88 of the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths.

(AQW 1836/17-22)

Mr Swann: Work to develop proposals for child death review arrangements and the establishment of a Child Death Overview Panel in Northern Ireland has been undertaken. That work took account of the relevant recommendations from the independent review of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland in 2016, and Recommendation 88 of the Independent Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths. It also took account of developments in other parts of the UK, where child death review arrangements have been subject to review and revision in recent years. Further work is necessary to ensure that an arrangement is implemented which maximises the learning from children's deaths in Northern Ireland and builds on the strength of existing review processes.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health what assessment he has made of (i) the decline in the number of hospital beds over recent years; and (ii) the likelihood that this trend will continue.

(AQW 1837/17-22)

Mr Swann: There is no policy to reduce overall bed numbers within hospitals. There is, however, a policy to reduce patients' length of stay in hospital. Unnecessary admissions or prolonged stays in hospital are bad for patients. This is particularly so in older people.

We are increasingly able to provide much more appropriate healthcare without the need to admit patients to hospital. Acute Care at Home is an example of this where older patients can be treated in their own home by medical, nursing and other health professional staff without the need for hospital admission. Many surgical procedures previously requiring admission are now carried out on a day case basis. There are many other examples of changing practice that allow patients to have diagnostic and treatment procedures without the need for admission to hospital. There is no doubt that this work should continue.

Bed numbers across the Health and Social Care system will be kept under constant review in order to ensure that the system maintains the necessary capacity to meet patients' needs in the most appropriate setting.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health when he will bring forward legislation to impose a duty of candour across the Health Service.

(AQW 1838/17-22)

Mr Swann: Work on the development of a duty of candour for the Health Service is being taken forward by the Hyponatraemia Implementation Programme. I expect to have detailed policy proposals in relation to duty of candour and openness by the end of March 2020, which could be issued shortly thereafter for public consultation. Any draft legislation required to implement a duty of candour will be brought forward following the conclusion of this public consultation exercise.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Health what proportion of his Department's budget is allocated to youth mental health services; and for a breakdown of how funding allocated to youth mental health services is spent.

(AQW 1845/17-22)

Mr Swann: In 2019/20, my Department allocated £22,008m of its opening budget to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. This is approximately broken down as follows:

Indicative investment in CAMHS 2019/20	Regional Total
Step- 2 – Early Intervention	£1.560m
Step- 3 – Core CAMHS	£8.940m
Crisis and Home Treatment Teams	£2.795m
Eating Disorders Teams	£0.640m
Addiction Services	£0.370m
Regional Inpatient Unit	£6.560m
Family Trauma Centre	£0.560m
Gender Identity	£0.120m
Forensic CAMHS Services	£0.195m
Regional recurrent investment for CAMHS training in psychological therapies	£0.050m
Demography and Inescapable Pressures (from the Confidence and Supply £10m Mental Health funding)	£0.352m
Non-recurrent investment under Transformation funding for CAMHS	£0.666m
Total Indicative Investment in CAMHS 2019/20	£22.808

This table does not include investments made by the Public Health Agency in a wide range of children's services, such as family support services, safeguarding and primary care services.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Health, following his statement on 6 February 2020 on suicide prevention and mental health services, (i) for an update on the work of the Multi Agency Triage Team (MATT); (ii) how many referrals have been received by MATT, broken down by (a) age; and (b) postcode; and (iii) whether he intends to (a) roll out the pilot scheme across Northern Ireland; and (b) extend access to the pilot scheme for those under 18 years old.

(AQW 1846/17-22)

Mr Swann:

- (i) The Multi Agency Triage Team (MATT) is a collaborative project which involves two Police Officers, a Community Mental Health Practitioner and a Paramedic working together to respond to people with mental health problems, aged 18 and over, who have accessed the 999 system.

MATT has been operational in the South Eastern HSC Trust area from July 2018. The pilot was expanded into Belfast HSC Trust area from August 2019. The service is operational between the hours of 7pm to 7am on a Friday and Saturday.
- (ii) There have been 388 referrals to MATT between July 2018 and December 2019. Due to GDPR requirements, age and postcode data is not able to be provided.
- (iii) A project evaluation is currently being developed and a business case being prepared which will contain a number of options on the future format of MATT. Options including the potential rollout across Northern Ireland and the implications of extending this service to under 18s will also be explored within this paper.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 678/17-22, how much it costs Health and Social Care Trusts to fill a single prescription for pain medications such as paracetamol, co-codamol or ibuprofen.

(AQW 1866/17-22)

Mr Swann: When a prescription is dispensed in the community, the cost is determined by the Northern Ireland Drug Tariff and the dispensing fee.

There are many different pack sizes, strengths and formulations of each of Paracetamol, Co-Codamol and Ibuprofen. Part 1 of the Northern Ireland Drug Tariff outlines the reimbursement price of drugs referred to.

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2034.htm>

A standard dispensing fee of £0.98 is then applied to each item on a prescription. The drug tariff plus the dispensing fee equals the total cost of the item.

These costs are in addition to any time required by a medical professional to see the patient and issue a prescription.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of (i) outpatient appointments; (ii) appointments cancelled by consultants; and (iii) patients who failed to attend appointments, in (a) 2017/18; (b) 2018/19; and (c) to date in 2019/20, at (i) Altnagelvin; (ii) Omagh; and (iii) South West Acute hospitals.

(AQW 1871/17-22)

Mr Swann: Data relating to outpatient activity, including the number of appointments attended, number of appointments cancelled by the hospital and the number of appointments patients did not attend (DNA), are published annually by financial year. It is not possible to distinguish those appointments cancelled by a consultant from the overall appointments cancelled by the hospital.

The most recent publication was released in August 2019 and can be found at the following link:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/hospital-statistics-outpatient-activity-statistics-201819>.

Data from April to September 2019 are provisional.

Number of outpatient attendances, hospital cancellations and DNAs (did not attend) in 2017/18, 2018/19 and April – September 2019

Hospital	Attendance / Cancellation Type	2017/18	2018/19	Apr-Sep 2019*
Altnagelvin	Outpatient Attendances	154,080	158,731	77,397
	Appointments cancelled by hospital	19,156	18,511	9,736
	Patient DNAs	16,934	15,221	7,434
Omagh	Outpatient Attendances	17,783	22,873	11,844
	Appointments cancelled by hospital	1,747	2,019	969
	Patient DNAs	1,369	1,650	862
South West Acute	Outpatient Attendances	35,941	36,420	18,280
	Appointments cancelled by hospital	3,121	3,305	1,282
	Patient DNAs	2,493	2,212	1,211

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return

* Figures are provisional

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health whether local students studying to become paramedics are entitled to an additional £5,000 grant each year of study.

(AQW 1875/17-22)

Mr Swann: Health and student finance are devolved matters across the UK and the support provided to students reflects the resources available to each administration and their assessment of workforce supply priorities. The £5,000 grant per year, recently announced by the UK Government in relation to a number of healthcare professions, relates only to English students at English universities.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health (i) why Venetoclax is not prescribed to treat patients with acute myeloid leukaemia; and (ii) for his assessment of Venetoclax as a treatment for acute myeloid leukaemia compared to chemotherapy.

(AQW 1876/17-22)

Mr Swann: Venetoclax is licensed in the UK for the treatment of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. Venetoclax is not licensed in the UK for the treatment of acute myeloid leukaemia, therefore it is not routinely commissioned in Northern Ireland for this purpose.

There may be clinical situations when medicines are used in a way that is different to the terms of their license ('off-label' use). This may be judged by the clinician to be in the best interests of their patients on the basis of the available evidence. In such cases prescribers carry their own responsibility for the use and prescribing of 'off-label' medicines, and so an 'off-label' medicine will only be used if there are no other licensed alternatives.

Decisions to prescribe a particular medicine are made by clinicians working in partnership with patients and their families, taking into account the evidence, the potential risks and benefits of treatment and individual circumstances. It is inappropriate for me to assess or compare medicines or treatments.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health (i) what pharmaceutical drugs are currently in short supply; and (ii) the number of patients affected by these shortages.

(AQW 1881/17-22)

Mr Swann: Medicines manufacturers are part of a global and highly complex industry and supply issues can sometimes occur for a variety of reasons such as regulatory action, manufacturing issues or shortages of ingredients.

There are well-established mitigation arrangements in place for dealing with any supply disruptions to ensure that patients continue to get the medicines they need. That can include, where necessary, the use of substitute medications.

At present, approximately 120 active supply issues are being managed on a UK-wide basis, although not all of those medicines are in short supply. It is not possible to provide details of the drugs involved due to the commercial sensitivity. Information is not available on the number of patients that may be affected by supply issues.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on preparations for Health Service provision after 31 December 2020, with reference to the provision of medicines and equipment imported from the European Union.

(AQW 1883/17-22)

Mr Swann: Maintaining the supply of medicines and healthcare supplies to Northern Ireland following the UK's exit from the European Union is a priority for my Department. Officials are engaging on a regular basis with local stakeholders involved in the supply chains as well as with the Department of Health and Social Care, who lead on supply issues for the UK, and with the other Devolved Administrations.

During the transition period up to 31 December 2020 and beyond, the Department will work to ensure that sufficient medicines and other healthcare supplies continue to be available for patients. Well established arrangements are also in place to respond to any supply disruptions that might arise.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on implementation of the Review of the Regional Eating Disorders Service.

(AQW 1885/17-22)

Mr Swann: The RQIA Review of Eating Disorder Services provided a number of recommendations and supporting recommendations. Department of Health officials and staff across the HSC have been working on completing the actions and I am pleased to say that all actions are either completed or no longer appropriate.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what consideration he has given to the issue of parental alienation in his plans for investment in mental health services.

(AQW 1887/17-22)

Mr Swann: Mental health is one of my top priorities and in line with New Decade, New Approach agreement, I will publish a Mental Health Action Plan in March and a Mental Health Strategy by December 2020.

The Mental Health Strategy will be co-produced and will provide a blueprint for the development and funding of mental health services for the next decade. The strategy will be of a cross-sectoral and cross-divisional nature, be patient centred and trauma informed, and will put the needs of people at the fore.

As the strategy will be co-produced with input from all relevant people and as it will focus on a whole life approach parental alienation may be an issue that is raised and will then be considered.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health (i) to detail the number of patients reporting to the Emergency Department at the Causeway Hospital in each of the last three years; and (ii) for a breakdown of the hospitals to which those admitted were transferred.

(AQW 1905/17-22)

Mr Swann:

- (i) It is assumed that this question refers to the number of attendances (new and unplanned reviews) at Causeway emergency department (ED). Information on the number of monthly attendances at EDs is published on a quarterly basis and available to view or download from:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hs-ni-wts-ecwt-data-q3-19-20.html>

- (ii) A breakdown of the hospitals to which patients attending Causeway ED were admitted to, is detailed in the attached table.

Hospital Admitted to *	Year Patient Left ED		
	2017	2018	2019
Royal Victoria	23	46	38
Causeway	8,111	7,880	8,098
Antrim	68	85	53
Altnagelvin Area	27	24	23
Other **	6	8	4
Total	8,235	8,043	8,216

* Data refers only to those patients who attended Causeway ED and who were subsequently admitted to hospital.

** Numbers at specific sites have been withheld to protect confidentiality.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of people employed in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, broken down by rank.

(AQW 1923/17-22)

Mr Swann: The tables below detail the number of people employed in NIFRS, broken down by rank in their substantive roles at 31 January 2020:

Firefighters:

Rank [^]	Wholetime*	On-Call*	Regional Control Centre (RCC)*
Chief Fire Officer	-	-	-
Assistant CFO	2	-	-
Area Commander	7	-	-
Group Commander	16	-	1
Assistant Group Commander	4	-	1
Station Commander	64	-	2
Watch Commander	90	55	5**
Crew Commander	138	187	11.5
Firefighter	492	648	34
Total	813	890	54.5

* On-Call reported in headcount, wholetime and RCC reported as full time equivalent

** Excludes 1 employee seconded to Fire Brigade Union

[^] Substantive rank, excludes detail of operational temporary promotions

Support Staff:

NJC Pay Scale	Number of Substantive Employees*
Scale 1/2	3.5
Scale 3	48.5
Scale 4	25
Scale 5	15
Scale 6	22.8
SO1	10
SO2	16.5
PO1	16

NJC Pay Scale	Number of Substantive Employees*
PO2	0
PO3	8.2
PO4	-
PO5	6
PO6	5
PO7	1
PO8	-
PO9	-
PO10	6
Director	-
Total	183.5

* Reflected as FTE not headcount (excludes detail of fixed term secondments, temporary promotion and agency staff)

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many days have been lost to sickness absence in each Health and Social workforce group over the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1924/17-22)

Mr Swann: Due to the variable nature of working patterns across Health and Social Care (HSC), the metric used to measure sickness absence is hours lost, not days.

Information on the number of hours lost due to sick leave/ industrial injury in each of the last five years in each occupational family and HSC Trust, is detailed in the tables below:

Hours Lost due to Sickness Absence in Belfast HSC Trust

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Administrative & Clerical	350,934	346,772	363,053	393,275	391,519
Estates	18,742	19,136	24,480	21,688	21,657
Support Services	306,037	279,269	275,865	325,864	320,980
Nursing & Midwifery	950,536	894,489	927,275	956,823	956,636
Social Services	266,429	301,127	327,455	384,011	379,457
Professional & Technical	248,685	254,492	261,794	270,599	300,365
Medical & Dental	55,917	58,600	62,691	74,517	75,083

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system

Hours Lost due to Sickness Absence in Northern HSC Trust

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Administrative & Clerical	182,349	181,974	190,208	180,897	176,695
Estates	10,890	11,410	13,632	15,878	13,530
Support Services	148,263	142,749	165,658	136,506	139,926
Nursing & Midwifery	568,810	564,301	532,960	525,462	503,139
Social Services 1	247,859	231,915	240,067	232,507	198,696
Professional & Technical	120,417	139,158	132,616	127,429	138,633
Medical & Dental	30,187	31,212	25,124	29,874	39,318

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system

1 Excludes domiciliary care.

Hours Lost due to Sickness Absence in South Eastern HSC Trust

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Administrative & Clerical	151,168	156,090	164,856	164,793	151,137
Estates	11,309	17,318	8,299	6,060	10,028
Support Services	145,583	144,418	145,675	147,733	146,943
Nursing & Midwifery	391,002	394,143	411,470	437,444	445,851
Social Services 1	182,470	197,901	191,263	210,773	197,881
Professional & Technical	92,588	93,896	111,049	114,721	108,622
Medical & Dental	17,122	15,262	16,482	22,760	26,395

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system

1 Excludes domiciliary care.

Hours Lost due to Sickness Absence in Southern HSC Trust

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Administrative & Clerical	111,975	126,568	119,094	142,028	144,414
Estates	7,699	8,063	7,296	8,175	7,695
Support Services	83,564	80,742	76,371	80,786	79,863
Nursing & Midwifery	379,266	418,053	391,000	420,400	428,110
Social Services 1	116,804	130,787	140,753	148,196	176,763
Professional & Technical	92,902	90,875	91,960	102,992	98,376
Medical & Dental	9,467	20,714	20,190	17,638	29,714

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system

1 Excludes domiciliary care.

Hours Lost due to Sickness Absence in Western HSC Trust

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Administrative & Clerical	161,691	172,145	190,373	184,542	195,080
Estates	10,690	10,713	12,171	9,563	8,610
Support Services	137,190	131,566	140,451	145,314	135,291
Nursing & Midwifery	530,501	588,901	582,998	541,552	547,647
Social Services	225,306	237,807	271,136	254,602	245,822
Professional & Technical	103,399	108,086	124,154	129,846	139,271
Medical & Dental	26,258	26,092	21,243	22,786	45,050

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system

Hours Lost due to Sickness Absence in Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Administrative & Clerical	10,788	10,020	8,921	10,947	8,631
Estates	38	113	30	150	255
Support Services	173	203	30	0	0

Occupational Family	Year				
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Medical & Dental	0	0	8	0	0
Ambulance	225,048	229,754	233,901	235,796	267,677

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the monetary cost of sickness absence to each Health and Social Care Trust over the last five years.

(AQW 1925/17-22)

Mr Swann: All HSC Trusts are continuing to pro-actively reduce sickness absence. Examples of measures being undertaken include; rapid referral to physiotherapy and staff counselling, rolling out of health fairs to promote positive health and well-being and providing training to managers on the management of stress and how to get the best use from the Occupational Health Service. I am pleased that the cost of sickness as a % of the total HSC pay bill over each of the last 5 years.

Information on the cost of sickness absence in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust is detailed in the table below:

Trust/Financial Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
BHSCT	£33,693,003	£32,283,513	£34,323,703	£37,252,607	£38,875,745
NHSCT	£23,473,755	£22,151,322	£21,323,472	£21,872,397	£21,833,942
NIAS	£3,962,312	£3,357,461	£4,201,190	£4,381,323	£5,118,916
SHSCT	£12,439,473	£13,677,713	£13,344,441	£14,508,509	£15,658,303
SEHSCT	£15,719,700	£15,535,866	£16,033,739	£17,868,145	£18,576,113
WHSCT	£17,376,468	£18,359,364	£19,569,144	£18,971,998	£19,135,166

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health whether the full £1 million allocated to address the Blood Contamination scandal will go to victims in the form of direct payments.

(AQW 1935/17-22)

Mr Swann: I met with groups of those infected and affected in Northern Ireland, earlier this month and assured them that the recently allocated £1 million will be spent in full on support for NI victims during this financial year.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health (i) what was the budget for individual injury allowance for the Royal Victoria Hospital in 2017/18; (ii) what percentage of that budget was spent; (iii) how many applications were made; (iv) how many applications were unsuccessful.

(AQW 1950/17-22)

Mr Swann: Figures provided are for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, not just the Royal Victoria Hospital, for the period April 2017 to March 2018:

- (i) No budget is allocated for Temporary Injury Allowance Payments.
- (ii) Based on upheld applications for Temporary Injury Allowance the amount paid to employees was £21,211.04.
- (iii) The Trust had six applications from employees for Temporary Injury Allowance for the April 2017 to March 2018.
- (iv) Three of the six applications were upheld. One application was not upheld and two applications were withdrawn.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health to outline the current waiting times for access to child and adolescent mental health services for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; and how many cases are in breach of the set target waiting times.

(AQW 1951/17-22)

Mr Swann: The waiting times for access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, including the number in breach of the set target waiting times (waiting over 9 weeks), is set out in Table 1 for 31 December 2019.

Table 1: The number of children waiting for access to child and adolescent mental health services, and the number over 9 weeks, for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (31 December 2019).

	Number of total waits	Number of waits over 9 weeks
Belfast HSC Trust	597	273

Note: This figure relates to the number of waits for a service to be carried out in the Belfast Trust, and not the number of people waiting on a service from the Belfast Trust.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health (i) why private cardiology appointments, including surgery, have been suspended at Royal Victoria Hospital; (ii) when private cardiology appointments will resume; and (iii) for his assessment of how this will impact patients who opted to pay privately due to long waiting lists.

(AQW 1959/17-22)

Mr Swann: Private treatment falls outside the remit of the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector and is therefore not a matter for my Department. The Belfast Trust has advised that private cardiac surgery has been temporarily suspended to allow the Trust to focus capacity and efforts on HSC patients. The Trust may be in a position to treat private patients again in the future, but this will be a matter for private providers to agree with the Belfast Trust.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health whether he plans to invest in domiciliary care services.

(AQW 1962/17-22)

Mr Swann: Addressing the difficulties facing domiciliary care will require both short term investment and long term reform.

The Power to People report argues that 'good professional social care cannot be achieved through a minimum wage workforce afforded little status'. It goes on to argue that we should establish a 'true rate of care' to recognise the need for a properly paid and valued workforce.

My Department is currently looking at the recommendations from the Power to People Report which relate to domiciliary care provision. Additional short term investment will be dependent on the budget settlement my Department receives.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health how he intends to ensure domiciliary care providers are properly funded.

(AQW 1963/17-22)

Mr Swann: Addressing the difficulties facing domiciliary care will require both short term investment and long term reform.

The Power to People report argues that 'good professional social care cannot be achieved through a minimum wage workforce afforded little status'. It goes on to argue that we should establish a 'true rate of care' to recognise the need for a properly paid and valued workforce.

My Department is currently looking at the recommendations from the Power to People Report which relate to domiciliary care provision. Additional short term investment will be dependent on the budget settlement my Department receives.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the reduction in the number of hospital beds in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1964/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of available overnight beds across all hospital facilities in HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland is collected on a quarterly basis. The average daily number of beds available for overnight stays and the year-on-year change for 2013/14 to 2018/19 (the latest full year of data available at present) have been provided in the table below.

The number of available beds is the number of beds on each ward opened overnight that were actually available for patients, measured at midnight. Beds reserved solely for day case admissions or regular day admissions are not included in these figures.

	Average number of daily available beds	% Change from previous year
2018/19	5,830	-1.1%
2017/18	5,893	-0.3%
2016/17	5,910	0.1%
2015/16	5,887	-2.2%
2014/15	6,034	-1.9%

Source: KH03a Trust returns

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of additional beds planned for hospitals in each of the next three years, broken down by hospital.

(AQW 1965/17-22)

Mr Swann: Bed numbers across the Health and Social Care system are kept under constant review in order to ensure that the system maintains the necessary capacity to meet patients' needs in the most appropriate setting.

It cannot be assumed that increasing the number of hospital beds to deal with pressures always represents the best outcome for patients. Patients are supported to return to a community or a home setting in a timely way once medically fit to leave hospital, ensuring they receive the ongoing care they require in the most appropriate place and regain a level of independence quicker.

My Department is advancing a range of health service reviews. The overarching aim of these reviews is to reduce variation in health services provision across Northern Ireland and improve patient outcomes. The reviews, once concluded and implemented, may impact on hospital bed numbers across the Northern Ireland health system.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of additional nurses to be (i) trained; and (ii) hired, in each of the next five years.

(AQW 1966/17-22)

Mr Swann:

- (i) 300 additional nursing and midwifery training places will be available in 2020/21, a further 300 in 2021/22, and a further 300 in 2022/23. I am not in a position to detail the numbers in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- (ii) It is not possible to detail how many additional nurses will be hired.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of allied health professionals employed by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, broken down by profession.

(AQW 1980/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of Allied Health Professionals employed in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust at 30th September 2019 is detailed in the table below:

AHP's Employed in Northern HSC Trust, at 30th September 2019

AHP Profession	Headcount	Whole-Time Equivalent
Dietitians	74	53.8
Occupational Therapists	282	237.7
Orthoptists	15	9.8
Physiotherapists	210	171.0
Podiatrists	62	51.4
Radiographers	138	123.0
Speech & Language Therapists	139	113.7
Total	920	760.4

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel & Subsistence (HRPTS) system

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health what properties or land are currently surplus to requirements within his Department and the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 2008/17-22)

Mr Swann: The properties or land which have been declared surplus to requirements by the Department and its Health and Social Care Trusts are detailed as follows:-

Trust	Property Name
BHSCT	16 Abbey Road Antrim
BHSCT	18 Abbey Road Antrim
BHSCT	20 Abbey Road Antrim
BHSCT	4 Annesley Street Belfast
BHSCT	4 Kirkliston Drive Belfast
BHSCT	McCartney House, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast
BHSCT	Minnowburn Elderly Persons Home, Belfast
BHSCT	Land at Muckamore Abbey Hospital
NHSCT	Audley Terrace, (former day centre), Ballymena

Trust	Property Name
NHSCT	Norfolk Court Hostel, 4 x council houses, Antrim
SEHSCT	Agriculture Lands, Fields, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick
SEHSCT	Dunmurry Clinic (Jointly Owned), Dunmurry
SEHSCT	Land at Service Entrance to Ulster Hospital Site
SEHSCT	Land at back of Ulster Hospital, Belfast
SEHSCT	Lisburn Health Centre, 25 Linenhall Street, Lisburn
SHSCT	Bessbrook Health Centre 12 Convent Hill Bessbrook.
SHSCT	John Mitchell Place 15 John Mitchell Place Newry
SHSCT	Needham House Kiln Street Newry
WHSCT	Tyrone County Hospital & Riverside House Sites, Omagh
WHSCT	2 Parcels of Trust land on Gransha Hospital Site.
DoH	Land near to Downshire Hospital Site (9 fields)
DoH	Market Street Community Services
DoH	St Dympnas Cemetery
DoH	Lands at Whiteabbey Hospital Site
DoH	Lands at Gransha Hospital Site

These properties will be disposed of in compliance with current public sector disposal guidance.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health whether any meetings have taken place between departmental officials and any representative of voluntary or private sector abortion providers since the passage of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019; and if so, to provide the dates on which the meeting took place and to place any minutes recorded in the Assembly library.

(AQW 2009/17-22)

Mr Swann: No such meetings have taken place.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health what action he is taking to ensure health professionals who conscientiously object to abortion will be effectively protected under the new regulatory framework for abortion when it comes into effect on 31 March 2020.

(AQW 2010/17-22)

Mr Swann: While the Regulations are a matter for the Secretary of State, I understand that provision for conscientious objection will be part of the new regulatory framework.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health whether his Department, the Health and Social Care Board or any Health and Social Care Trust is funding training of health professionals with regard to abortion in advance of the implementation of the new abortion framework on 31 March 2020; and if so, to outline (i) who is being funded to provide such training; and (ii) who is receiving the training.

(AQW 2011/17-22)

Mr Swann: Neither the Department, the Health and Social Care Board, nor any of the Health and Social Care Trusts are currently funding training of health professionals with regard to abortion in advance of the implementation of new abortion regulations.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health how his Department will implement the commitment in New Decade, New Approach to "provide increased investment to fully implement service improvements for palliative and end of life care including enhancing the contribution of hospices; and to increase support for palliative perinatal care."

(AQW 2012/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care (HSC) budget for 2020/21 is still to be determined, however, it is anticipated that the Department will continue to face a shortfall and difficult decisions will have to be taken. In addition to the funding requirement for inescapable pressures, additional funding is necessary to take forward the commitments set out in New Decade, New Approach. A final decision on how to implement this commitment will not be possible until the funding position is determined.

My Department will continue to liaise with the Department of Finance in relation to the budget settlement and with Health and Social Care on options to address any residual funding shortfall.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health whether any request has been made by his Department or the Health and Social Care Board to any voluntary or private sector abortion providers, or their representatives, to provide abortion services in Northern Ireland when the new regulatory framework is put in place on 31 March 2020.

(AQW 2013/17-22)

Mr Swann: No such request has been made.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Health, in light of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee recommendation seeking a three year minimum, moving to five year, multi-year ring fenced financial settlement to aid transformation in the Health Service, whether he has made a formal request for such a funding model.

(AQW 2015/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am aware of this recommendation, and agree that successive one year budgets are impeding planning and investment in our health and social care services. I fully support the need for a multi-year ring fenced financial settlement to aid Health Service transformation and such an approach is shared by my Executive colleagues.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health at what age children and young people can access child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) crisis services; and to outline the transition from CAMHS crisis services to adult mental health crisis services.

(AQW 2033/17-22)

Mr Swann: All young people under the age of 18 can access CAMHS crisis response interventions.

For any young person who is currently receiving any service within CAMHS and needs to transition to adult mental health services, planning will commence 6 months in advance of the young person's 18th birthday. If CAMHS is currently providing a service intervention to a young person in a crisis, CAMHS will continue until the crisis is resolved even after their 18th birthday or until a level of stability is achieved. At this stage, transition plans will be progressed and formulated on the basis of assessed need.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health whether he has any plans to introduce a free or subsidised parking scheme for personnel at health and social care facilities.

(AQW 2034/17-22)

Mr Swann: I have no plans to review my Department's policy on car parking charges at this time.

The aim of my Department's policy on car parking is to recover the cost of providing car parks across the Health Estate. It is the responsibility of each Health and Social Care Trust to determine the way the policy is applied to each of their sites to enable them to recover these costs.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health whether any spare accommodation in Bangor Health Centre could be made readily available to GP practices who are operating under surgery and administration space pressures in the Centre.

(AQW 2077/17-22)

Mr Swann: I understand that the GPs in Bangor Health Centre are facing accommodation pressures. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that, unfortunately, there are no vacant rooms at Bangor Health Centre at present. The Trust hopes to be in a position to create vacant space in the Health Centre by relocating Trust services to Bangor Hospital this Summer, with refurbishment works then undertaken to reconfigure the vacated space to GPs' requirements. It is estimated that the programme for the works will see this project complete in 2021. The Trust recognises that this is an interim solution to the accommodation pressures facing the practices and so has also identified the development of a Primary and Community Care Centre as a key priority in their Capital Plan.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health how his Department is adopting a trauma-informed approach when developing policy and legislation.

(AQW 2123/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department is leading on a number of trauma-informed initiatives and working to raise awareness of the impact of trauma among policy makers.

Under the cross-departmental Early Intervention Transformation Programme, led by my department, £1.4million has been invested in a Trauma Informed Practice Project, which is being taken forward by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. The Project aims to deliver systems change by embedding a better understanding of adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed thinking across the health, education, social care, justice and voluntary sectors. Within this Project, a range of workforce development modules have been established including the Be the Change Leadership Programme in which my officials participate.

In addition, Signs of Safety, which is a strengths-based approach to children's social work services, is being rolled out across Northern Ireland over a five year period. It aims to improve the safety of children by working with families to identify strengths, manage problems and agree solutions to keep children safe, whilst improving outcomes for both children and families.

My department is also developing a regional framework for integrated therapeutic care, which will be applied to all settings in which looked after children are cared for. This new therapeutic framework is underpinned by research and current best practice in trauma-responsive service design. A key component of the new framework will focus on building caring and purposeful relationships with children and young people, based on a shared understanding of the impacts of trauma on child development. The aim is that the application of a regionally consistent, trauma-responsive therapeutic approach will lead to improved outcomes for looked after children on a number of levels.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health to outline the progress made by the taskforce to help protect social workers from violence and abuse, since it was created in November 2018.

(AQW 2157/17-22)

Mr Swann: The publication of a research report carried out by BASW (NI), 'Insult and Injury: Exploring the impacts of intimidation, threats and violence against social workers' highlighted the issue of threats, violence and intimidation towards HSC social work and social care staff.

My Department established a taskforce to develop a professional governance framework setting out good practice examples of employer support for social work and social care staff affected by work related violence. The draft framework aims to bring together existing good practice in this area in order that staff feel supported, safe, and know what support and assistance they can expect from employers.

This work is almost complete but it has been delayed due to other Departmental priorities.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health for an update on the North West medical school, including (i) what stage the business case is; and (ii) the anticipated date for the first intake of students.

(AQW 2158/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are two separate business case processes in relation to the development of a Graduate Entry Medical School (GEMS).

The first process, which has been under way since 2017, has involved significant assistance from Departmental officials on the development of Ulster University's own business case for a GEMS.

The second process is the development of the Department of Health's own business case which will outline the need to be addressed by any expansion of medical education. That business case is nearing completion by Departmental officials and will be formally submitted to me shortly.

I am waiting for a formal response from the Northern Ireland Office on the extent of the promised capital and resource funding from the UK Government outlined in New Decade, New Approach. This will have implications for the content of the final Departmental business case.

Any decisions on this matter will need to be taken by the Executive as this matter cuts across the responsibilities of the Departments of Finance, Economy and Health.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1079/17-22, and in relation to the Armagh Community Treatment and Care Centre - £15m, (i) whether a site has been identified; (ii) what procurement method will be used; and (iii) in what financial year the anticipated capital works are expected to take place.

(AQW 2182/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department has not, to date, received a business case in respect of a Community Treatment and Care Centre in Armagh.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health for an update on the current number of permanent residents in the Roddens Residential Home.

(AQW 2215/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are currently four permanent residents in the Roddens Residential Care Home.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1079/17-22 and in relation to the bids for (i) Crossmaglen Day Care Centre; (ii) Daisyhill Hospital Phased Redevelopment; and (iii) Daisyhill Hospital Bed Evacuation Strategy, (a) to outline what each bid is for; (b) whether his Department has received or approved the business cases for these bids; and (c) in which financial year it is anticipated these capital works will begin.

(AQW 2254/17-22)

Mr Swann:

Crossmaglen Day Centre:

- (i) (a) The bid is to replace the current day centre accommodation. (b) My department does not have a current business case for this Centre. (c) Until an up to date business case is approved and funding identified it is not possible to anticipate when capital works will begin.

- (ii) Daisy Hill Hospital Phased Redevelopment (a) The bid includes a new 5 storey block on the hospital site, the refurbishment of the current hospital along with additional car parking provision, and the refurbishment of the current hospital. (b) My department has not yet received a business case for this bid. (c) Until a business case is approved and funding identified it is not possible to anticipate when capital works will begin.
- (iii) Daisy Hill Hospital Bed Evacuation Strategy (a) The bid is to enhance the means of escape at Daisy Hill Hospital in the event of a fire/emergency evacuation. (b) A business case has been received by my department (c) Until the business case is approved and funding identified it is not possible to anticipate when capital works will begin.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health whether a new build health centre for the Colin area of West Belfast is on the capital bespoke list for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; and on what date this work is likely to commence.
(AQW 2392/17-22)

Mr Swann: My officials are currently working on a capital planning review exercise to inform a long term assessment of likely future capital requirements. In response to this, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust have submitted a proposal to build a new health centre as part of the Colin Town Centre Masterplan. This proposal will be considered alongside other proposals submitted in this exercise. My ability to take forward these proposals will be subject to future budget availability and Value for Money.

In the interim, works to address the immediate health needs of the Colin area through an extension to and refurbishment of the existing Stewartstown Road Health Centre are anticipated to commence in 2020/21, again subject to adequate funding being received by my Department as part of the 2020/21 budget process.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health what measures are being taken on an all-island basis to prevent and deal with the spread of the Corona Virus; and what emergency preparations his Department is making to deal with any potential outbreak in collaboration with his counterparts in Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 2423/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department and the Public Health Agency continue to work closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across this island and with the rest of the UK to ensure we are well prepared to deal with the situation as events unfold.

My Department will maintain regular contact with officials in the Republic of Ireland and have agreed that the Health Service Executive in Ireland and the Health and Social Care Board in Northern Ireland can explore potential cooperation between the two jurisdictions.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health, in circumstances when a nursing home resident wants to give a cash gift to a family member, how an appropriate gift is defined.
(AQW 2463/17-22)

Mr Swann: Each resident's financial circumstances will be different as will the arrangements for paying for their care. In the first instance it is advised they discuss the matter with the local HSC Trust (if the Trust is funding their care) and also to seek legal/financial advice from an appropriate professional.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the roll-out of the faecal immunochemical test for bowel cancer.
(AQO 210/17-22)

Mr Swann: In April 2019 the Department of Health Northern Ireland announced that the Faecal Immunochemical Test known as FIT should be adopted by the NI Bowel Cancer Screening Programme as the primary screening test for bowel cancer. This is in keeping with the Northern Ireland Screening Committee recommendation for a phased approach to the further expansion of screening for bowel cancer, with the first step being to replace the current Faecal Occult Blood or FOB test with FIT. The Public Health Agency have now awarded the contract for FIT testing kits and laboratory equipment and initial testing of the pathway will commence in April with the intention to have FIT fully operational from June 2020.

Extending the age range will be considered following the implementation of FIT. The reason for this is because FIT needs to be fully implemented first along with associated increase in diagnostic capacity or colonoscopy. The additional service capacity including colonoscopy and the costs of extending the programme to people aged 50 to 59 years will then need to be examined before I can make an informed decision on this.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health for an update on the priorities he has set out in his capital spending plans for rural GP practices.
(AQO 214/17-22)

Mr Swann: I recognise the challenges facing General Practice in Northern Ireland, particularly in rural areas.

As such, my Department remains committed to the delivery of the Hub and Spoke model as set out in the Primary Care Infrastructure Development Programme's Strategic Implementation Plan. Hubs will provide services that do not require a hospital bed but which are too complex or specialised to be provided in a local GP surgery, a spoke.

Business cases have commenced for the next tranche of hubs which includes a new health and care centre in Lisnaskea.

In delivering the Strategic Implementation Plan investment is also required in GP practices. These developments will range from new build developments and major extensions to smaller refurbishments.

By the end of the 2019/20 financial year my Department will have invested some £4.75m in GP practices across the province which includes practices in rural areas, for example in Castledearg, Newtownhamilton, Ballycastle and Rasharkin.

My ability to continue this rolling investment in GP practices will be dependent on future budgetary allocations.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Health what plans he has to address difficulties in domiciliary care and the backlog of care packages.

(AQO 215/17-22)

Mr Swann: Addressing the difficulties facing domiciliary care will require both short term investment and long term reform.

The Power to the People report argues that 'good professional social care cannot be achieved through a minimum wage workforce afforded little status'. It goes on to argue that we should establish a 'true rate of care' to recognise the need for a properly paid and valued workforce.

My Department is currently looking at the recommendations from the Power to People Report and an action plan is being developed. However, any additional short term investment will be dependent on the budget settlement my Department receives.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister of Health to outline the plans his Department has to reduce gynaecology clinic waiting lists.

(AQO 216/17-22)

Mr Swann: I fully appreciate that every patient should be able to avail of the best treatment that the health service can provide, and in a timely manner. It is regrettable that any patient has to wait longer than they should for a diagnosis, assessment or treatment and I fully understand the distress and anxiety that long waiting times cause, particularly when patients are suffering pain and discomfort.

Tackling the current unacceptable waiting lists in all specialties, including gynaecology, is a priority for me. Whilst transformation and organising our services more effectively is key, in parallel significant investment is also required to address the backlog of those patients that have been waiting the longest.

The scale at which I will be able to tackle the unacceptable waiting times will be greatly influenced by the outcome of the current budgetary discussions.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health whether he will ensure that addressing inequalities in oral health between areas of high and low deprivation will form part of an oral health strategy.

(AQO 217/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are currently no plans in place to develop a new Oral Health Strategy as most of the existing document remains fit for purpose. This reflects the current evidence-base and cost-effectiveness of available interventions, as well as the available funding.

The Chief Dental Officer has established Oral Health Options Groups to allow for the consideration and development of further interventions for the two most urgent groups at present, namely children and the elderly. These groups will deliver results more quickly than through the development of a completely new strategy document.

Given that the risk of poor dental health is higher where there is greater deprivation, any policy aimed at improving overall dental health would need to target the most deprived with a focus on prevention.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of the new regulations on abortion due to come into effect by 31st March 2020.

(AQO 218/17-22)

Mr Swann: Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 provided for the repeal, on 22 October 2019, of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act. These were the main provisions prohibiting abortion in Northern Ireland.

The Act requires the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, by 31 March 2020, to make whatever changes to the law are necessary to give effect to the recommendations of the March 2018 Report by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

A consultation on the abortion proposals ended on 16 December 2019 and the UK Government is currently working on draft Regulations.

The exact content of the Regulations is a matter for the Secretary of State.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the accessibility of the faecal immunochemical test for bowel cancer across all age groups.

(AQO 219/17-22)

Mr Swann: In April 2019 the Department of Health Northern Ireland announced that the Faecal Immunochemical Test known as FIT should be adopted by the NI Bowel Cancer Screening Programme as the primary screening test for bowel cancer. This is in keeping with the Northern Ireland Screening Committee recommendation for a phased approach to the further expansion of screening for bowel cancer, with the first step being to replace the current Faecal Occult Blood or FOB test with FIT. The Public Health Agency have now awarded the contract for FIT testing kits and laboratory equipment and initial testing of the pathway will commence in April with the intention to have FIT fully operational from June 2020.

Extending the age range will be considered following the implementation of FIT. The reason for this is because FIT needs to be fully implemented first along with associated increase in diagnostic capacity or colonoscopy. The additional service capacity including colonoscopy and the costs of extending the programme to people aged 50 to 59 years will then need to be examined before I can make an informed decision on this.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the current financial pressures in the community pharmacy network.

(AQO 221/17-22)

Mr Swann: Community pharmacies provide important services within communities across Northern Ireland that are highly valued by the public and so I fully recognise the need to have a stable and sustainable network that is commissioned to provide those services.

Current levels of funding for community pharmacy services have been informed by a Cost of Service Investigation, alongside other sources of information, including an ongoing margins survey. The Department considers the level of remuneration sufficient to meet its statutory objectives for current commissioned services.

However, community pharmacies have the potential to do a lot more to contribute to population level improvements in health and support health and social care reform. In recognition of this, my officials have been working with the Health and Social Care Board and Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland, the representative body for community pharmacy contractors, to develop and test a number of new services and reform initiatives.

It is now appropriate to consider how those services might be commissioned and delivered as part of a new contractual framework for community pharmacy. In that context, I have asked officials to develop a roadmap which aims to support the introduction of the contractual framework with new services during 2020/21.

I will also be meeting with representatives of Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland soon to discuss the roadmap. Where funding requirements have been identified to deliver additional pharmacy services, those bids will be considered alongside other Departmental pressures.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health for an update on the business case for the Magee Graduate Entry Medical School.

(AQO 213/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Medical Student Places Review, published in January 2019, clearly highlighted that there needs to be an expansion of medical school places in Northern Ireland and I am strongly committed to addressing this priority. In terms of business cases, there are two separate processes in relation to the development of a Graduate Entry Medical School.

The first process, which has been under way since 2017, relates to Ulster University's own business case for a Graduate Entry Medical School. The Department has been assisting with this. This work has involved commentary on several drafts of the business case, by way of advising on its compliance with the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation.

The second process is the development of the Department of Health's own business case. That business case is nearing completion by Departmental officials and will be formally submitted to me shortly. It has been developed in conjunction with the Strategic Investment Board and considers options to increase medical student places in Northern Ireland, informed by the Medical Student Places Review.

I recently met with Robin Walker, Northern Ireland Office Minister, to seek clarification on the extent of the promised capital and resource funding from the UK Government outlined in New Decade, New Approach. I have just today received his written formal response which will be taken into account by my Department in the finalisation of the Departmental business case.

I have also written to the Minister for the Economy to seek an update meeting on her Department's work on this issue.

Any decisions on this matter will need to be taken by the Executive as this matter cuts across the responsibilities of the Departments of Finance, Economy and Health, and has very significant recurrent funding implications. The chosen option must deliver the HSC's specific future medical needs, represent value for money, and be affordable.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health when he will address the shortfall in funding for Community Pharmacy Services, as identified in the Cost of Services Investigation for Community Pharmacy in Northern Ireland report.

(AQO 220/17-22)

Mr Swann: Community pharmacies provide important services within communities across Northern Ireland that are highly valued by the public and so I fully recognise the need to have a stable and sustainable network that is commissioned to provide those services.

Current levels of funding for community pharmacy services have been informed by a Cost of Service Investigation, alongside other sources of information, including an ongoing margins survey. The Department considers the level of remuneration sufficient to meet its statutory objectives for current commissioned services.

However, community pharmacies have the potential to do a lot more to contribute to population level improvements in health and support health and social care reform. In that context, my officials together with the Health and Social Care Board have been working with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) on a programme of reform which includes new services, development of the pharmacy workforce plus updated arrangements for reimbursing community pharmacists for medicines dispensed.

It is therefore disappointing that community pharmacy contractors have voted to take industrial action at this time, particularly whilst active discussions are ongoing with CPNI. I have also agreed to meet with CPNI in the coming weeks which means the timing of its announcement is regrettable and surprising. However, in advance of that meeting I have asked officials to prepare a roadmap that could inform a new contractual framework for community pharmacy for 2020/21.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of street light outages; and (ii) the budgetary requirement to repair them, in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 421/17-22)

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): The cost to provide a full street lighting repair service each year is £3.2m.

There are currently 12,713 street lighting outages reported on the street lighting management system. My Department cannot provide this information by Constituency. However, I can advise that there are 3857 in Northern Division, 2103 in Eastern Division, 4301 in Southern Division and 2452 in Western Division.

The cost to repair all of these outages is estimated at £870,000.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans her Department has to address traffic congestion in (i) Omagh town centre; and (ii) the wider Omagh town area.

(AQW 533/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Traffic congestion occurs on the road network in Omagh, especially during peak periods, as is the case in many other towns in Northern Ireland. The congestion is largely a consequence of both local and strategic traffic having to compete for the same finite road space in and around the town. In this regard I recognise that the planned A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) dual carriageway would transform the traffic flow regime in Omagh.

My officials will continue to seek to identify effective and affordable measures to improve traffic progression on the town's road network to enhance capacity. They are also seeking to introduce further walking and cycling measures to provide and promote active travel within the town and continue to work collaboratively with other stakeholders, to maximise opportunities to do so.

I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better results for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland. I will be assessing capital funding pressures across my Department and the budget made available to me for the period ahead. It is therefore too early to comment on specific measures to address congestion in Omagh town.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on further junction upgrades as part of the LD1 project in north Lisburn.

(AQW 641/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Planning conditions associated with the Outline Planning Permission for the Brokerstown residential development (LD1) in Lisburn and an Article 40 Planning Agreement, between the planning authority and the developers, require the development consortium to upgrade three junctions:

- Ballinderry Road / Knockmore Road Junction;
- Knockmore Road / Prince William Road Junction; and
- Ballymacash Road/Prince William Road Junction.

Improvement works to the Ballinderry Road / Knockmore Road Junction were prioritised by my Department and were substantially completed by the consortium in October 2019. These works were coordinated to include adjacent road works for the new Home Bargains store on Ballinderry Road east.

My officials have undertaken a number of design reviews of the proposed improvements to the Knockmore Road / Prince William Road Junction prepared by transport consultants, RPS, on behalf of the consortium. A number of design issues

have still to be resolved by the designer. When these are resolved and an acceptable design is achieved, the consortium will be responsible for programming and undertaking these junction improvements. As these works will be on the public road network, my officials will assist the designers to plan the temporary traffic management arrangements, which will seek to minimise the impact on road users and the nearby Laurelhill Community College and Killowen Primary School.

My Department has been consulted by the planning authority on a separate planning application for improvement works to the Ballymacash Road / Prince William Road Junction. My officials have undertaken a number of design reviews of the proposed junction layout and are presently assisting transport consultant, RPS, to resolve the outstanding design issues. Once an acceptable design is achieved, my Department will respond to the planning consultation. Thereafter, and subject to planning approval, the developer will be responsible for undertaking the improvements to the Ballymacash Road / Prince William Road junction, in line with any planning conditions that may apply.

Responsibility for enforcement of the Article 40 Planning Agreement for LD1 and planning conditions pertaining to these road works, is a matter for the planning authority.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what actions her Department is taking to alleviate congestion on Omagh bypass; and (ii) what funding has been provided to undertake these actions.

(AQW 682/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the concerns of many in the local community caused by congestion. The primary cause of congestion along Omagh Throughpass is the need for the road to accommodate both local and strategic traffic. The planned new A5 dual carriageway project would allow strategic traffic using the existing A5 and A32 routes to completely bypass the town and enable local traffic to move much more freely.

Subject to the satisfactory completion of all statutory procedures and all necessary environmental assessments, I am hopeful that the first phase of this scheme, from New Buildings to north of Strabane (Phase 1a) could commence in late 2020 / early 2021 with completion in 2023. My Department has spent £80.3million on this project up to 2018/19 and is forecasting to spend a further £1.3million in 2019/20.

As an Executive flagship project I am hopeful that funds for delivery of this Phase will be forthcoming, aided by the committed contribution of £75 million over the next three years from the Irish Government.

In the interim I can assure you that my officials will continue to explore affordable options to optimise traffic progression on the through pass and enhance capacity. My Department is also seeking to explore further walking and cycling options to provide and promote active travel within the town.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the development of the Knockmore Road link to the Sprucefield Park and Ride.

(AQW 700/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Knockmore Link Road is identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan as a non-strategic road scheme, that is to be developer led and funded. I understand it is an integral part of the development of the adjacent lands at Blaris, which is currently going through the planning process and is being considered by the planning authority, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC).

My Department is a consultee to that process and my officials have just completed a detailed design review of the Knockmore Link Road, providing a positive consultation response to LCCC. My officials are also currently undertaking a review of the Transport Assessment.

The planning application is a matter for the Council in the first instance and, if planning approval is obtained, the developer will then be responsible for progressing this development, in line with any planning conditions that may apply.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure why lighting at her Department's Park and Ride and Park and Share facilities remain on throughout the night when there are no vehicles present.

(AQW 838/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's investment in Park and Ride/Share projects has been a key enabler in the growth of passenger numbers on our main and regional bus services and has reduced the volume of traffic on the roads network. A key factor in this has been a focus of enhancing public perception as to the safety and attractiveness of Park and Ride/Share sites and providing lighting consistent with the adjacent road lighting is important in addressing these perceptions.

I am aware that, since 2015, all new Park and Ride/Share sites utilise energy efficient LED lighting installations and this will apply also to any future sites. My Department also has an ongoing programme to have the lighting at older Park and Ride/Share sites upgraded to similar systems and while I would like to take this programme forward quickly, unfortunately I have inherited severe and challenging budget restrictions and this curtails my capacity to do so.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) her Department's definition of a grass verge in rural areas; (ii) her Department's responsibilities and liabilities in relation to grass verges; and (iii) the policy for inspection and repair of grass verges.

(AQW 951/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- i) In rural areas, a road verge is usually a narrow strip of grass located between the carriageway road surface edge and the boundary of a road. Where the boundary of the road has been altered, for example to facilitate development, it is not automatic that the Department's responsibility extends to the new boundary.
- (ii) Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, places a duty on the Department to maintain all public roads in reasonable condition giving due consideration to the finite level of available funding.

The primary verge maintenance obligation relates to the safety of the road users, by ensuring that visibility is not restricted and verges are free from obstructions and without hazardous defects. All roadside verges and sightlines were cut at least twice in rural areas throughout the 2019 grass cutting season, which runs from April to October. To ensure public safety was not compromised, sightlines were also cut as required.

- (iii) Defects are generally identified by officials during routine maintenance safety inspections. Under my Department's current policy, the urgency of repair is determined taking into account a number of factors. However, unless verge damage is severe and likely to cause a danger to road users, such repairs are usually dealt with by means of planned programmes of work. Prior to the imposition of severe budget cuts on the Department the policy was to cut grass five times in urban areas and twice in rural areas throughout the grass cutting seasons, which runs from April to October.

As a result of budget cuts and financial pressures the Department has had to reduce its routine road maintenance activities to a limited service which prioritises work based on the perceived risk. While I would like to do more in relation to verge maintenance and indeed other routine maintenance functions, the severe and challenging budget constraints that I have inherited limit my capacity to do so.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will explore the feasibility of removing the traffic chicanes on the B12 Aghalee Road., Aghagallon.
(AQW 960/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have asked officials to consider the appropriateness of the existing traffic calming arrangements in the village of Aghagallon.

If the review identifies any shortcomings, appropriate improvement works will be considered for inclusion in future programmes.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she would consider revisiting the decision to not impose a 30mph speed limit on Orlock Road, Groomsport.
(AQW 1055/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Speed limits are currently considered and assessed using the guidelines set out in my Department's publication Setting Local Speed Limits in Northern Ireland. This document is available at www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/setting-local-speed-limits-northern-ireland-rsppg-e051

My officials carried out a review of the speed limit on Orlock Road, Groomsport which found that the nature of the road, the amount of development and collision history did not warrant a reduction to a 30mph speed limit. Therefore, I do not propose to implement any reduction at this time but I have asked officials to keep the situation under review and to advise me of any changes in circumstances that might point to the need for a different approach.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) her Department's plans to improve the existing A5; (ii) the available budget for such improvements; and (iii) the amount spent on the road, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 1100/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department is progressing the A5WTC Dual Carriageway Flagship project from New Buildings to the border south of Aughnacloy in a phased approach. Construction of Phase 1a could start in late 2020 / early 2021, with potential whole scheme completion in 2028. This timeline will be subject to the successful conclusion of all necessary statutory processes, environmental assessments and the availability of funding over this period. The current cost estimate to complete the scheme is £1.1 billion. Expenditure on the development of the A5WTC over each of the past three years has been £3.9m in 2016/17; £2.6m in 2017-18 and £0.76m in 2018-19.

The existing A5 single carriageway forms part of the trunk road network, and as with other trunk carriageways, the Department undertakes a regular programme of routine maintenance, such as grass cutting, gully emptying and patching. It has, however, been assumed that your question refers to structural maintenance resurfacing works that have been completed along the existing road. During each of the last three financial years, expenditure on carriageway resurfacing / reconstruction has been as follows:

- 2016/17 - £559,000
- 2017/18 - £240,000
- 2018/19 - £467,000

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures are being put in place to address the backlog of street lighting faults in the West Tyrone constituency.

(AQW 1195/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand the concerns of the public affected by street light outages and am working with my Department to address this issue as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, as a result of severe budget cuts my Department had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result priority had to be given to hazardous and group outages and other outages were taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I am pleased that this need has been recognised and welcome the recent additional allocation made to my Department. I am keen to allocate all available funding, after fully funding the winter gritting services up to 31 March, to fix broken Street Lights and improve road surfaces by filling potholes in all four divisions.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has carried out a recent traffic assessment of Moira to determine if mitigation is required to alleviate congestion.

(AQW 1204/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I can advise my Department's efforts in recent years have been focused on mitigating the effects of through traffic on the village and improving the road layout. A formal traffic study was carried out within Moira, between the Moira / M1 roundabout and the Old Kilmore Road roundabout in 2008. Subsequently, traffic signals have been provided at Main Street / Meeting Street junction in 2010 and right turn pockets into local retail sites, and a garage outlet between Backwood Road and the Old Kilmore Road junction in 2009/2010.

My Department also considered options to increase the capacity of the west bound off-slip from the M1 and the A3 leading towards Moira, to reduce traffic queuing in the evening peak in 2011. However, the costs were considered prohibitive for a scheme to be progressed further at that time.

Congestion in towns across Northern Ireland is often due to the dependency on the private car for the vast majority of trips. The Department has initiated work on a new suite of Transport Plans setting out new transport infrastructure proposals for delivery to 2035. The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan will contain schemes relating to the inter-urban transport routes in Northern Ireland, including the motorway network and rail networks.

In addition, my Department is preparing a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, which includes Belfast and its wider catchment area including the growth ambitions of the Councils. That Transport Plan will consider a range of future commuter options.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she has plans to introduce an MOT exemption for Vehicles of Historical Interest, as in Great Britain, in order to remove them from the MOT waiting list.

(AQW 1226/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a difference as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest (VHIs) are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following interest from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be considered here.

This is an issue which I wish to examine carefully, and will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will extend the existing MOT exemption for motor vehicles first registered prior to 1960 to cover all Vehicles of Historic Interest, similar to what is already in place in Great Britain

(AQW 1276/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a difference as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest (VHIs) are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following interest from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be considered here.

This is an issue that I wish to examine carefully, and I will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) why her Department is removing street lights from unadopted roads; (ii) whether a public consultation was carried out before this decision was made; (iii) whether notification is given to local residents before street lights are removed; (iv) whether any assessment was carried out on the impact of this decision on elderly, disabled, partially sighted or vulnerable residents.

(AQW 1346/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There are many street lights on privately owned property, which historically have been maintained by my Department. Under this arrangement, normal routine maintenance will continue to be carried out until the street lights reach end of their useful life, for example, if the electricity supply fails or a lighting installation becomes structurally or electrically unsafe.

At that stage, the lights will be removed and not replaced. This is in accordance with the Department's current policy, which has been in place for many years under previous Ministers and is applied strictly. Finding a satisfactory way forward on this issue is severely constrained by the severe budgetary pressures my Department has been dealing with over recent years and the fact that it involves land my Department is not responsible for.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Lisbane Park, Conlig.
(AQW 1354/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Lisbane Park, Conlig. The road will, however, continue to be subject to monitoring during periodic inspections and may be included in a future work programme. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Henderson Avenue, Conlig.
(AQW 1356/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department considers Henderson Avenue, Conlig to be in a reasonable condition and therefore has no current plans to carry out resurfacing at this location. The road will, however, continue to be subject to monitoring during periodic inspections and may be included in a future work programme. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of defects identified by her Department on roads, broken down by local council area per month, over each of the last three years.
(AQW 1371/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The following tables provide details of the number of carriageway, hard shoulder and layby surface defects (which includes potholes, cracking, depressions etc.) that had been recorded and listed for repair in each month of the last three years (1st January 2017 to 31st December 2019), by council area:

Surface Defects recorded 2017

Council	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Antrim and Newtownabbey	461	383	602	369	236	224	114	183	153	153	193	140
Ards and North Down	250	341	447	199	141	96	80	84	69	94	144	69
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	1522	1490	1848	912	556	451	186	385	376	467	481	396
Belfast	1059	1269	1540	429	259	262	140	230	218	272	242	161
Causeway Coast and Glens	720	646	762	471	175	116	122	196	153	210	227	233
Derry City and Strabane	742	758	990	365	367	235	200	215	225	332	271	357
Fermanagh and Omagh	1107	1916	1898	467	440	286	248	369	488	412	582	411
Lisburn and Castlereagh	517	552	739	230	176	90	136	129	86	198	167	190

Council	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mid and East Antrim	757	826	1060	381	221	122	100	115	167	191	216	225
Mid Ulster	1234	1479	1421	1102	621	349	210	443	284	591	616	383
Newry, Mourne and Down	1463	1866	2036	1584	971	489	386	511	441	529	469	377

Surface Defects recorded 2018

Council	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Antrim and Newtownabbey	677	803	879	885	749	392	526	542	322	556	525	257
Ards and North Down	300	380	500	418	378	235	141	328	239	327	206	179
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	1049	1480	1139	1471	2743	2182	1504	1722	1663	1957	1075	936
Belfast	757	931	1043	885	842	526	417	377	284	348	291	223
Causeway Coast and Glens	573	519	617	654	1053	751	741	706	493	817	560	433
Derry City and Strabane	1035	1375	1229	1507	1018	740	676	488	536	820	699	419
Fermanagh and Omagh	810	2043	1929	1607	1529	836	948	1403	1414	1639	752	501
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1090	1070	865	1257	737	533	528	446	500	351	303	322
Mid and East Antrim	1217	990	1058	1119	1422	905	417	658	735	526	600	404
Mid Ulster	1602	1995	1425	1912	1919	1149	1171	1150	756	1036	798	658
Newry, Mourne and Down	1301	1742	1622	1804	2879	2698	1410	3175	1774	2230	1433	974

Surface Defects recorded 2019

Council	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Antrim and Newtownabbey	583	774	742	411	530	305	300	279	205	287	260	297
Ards and North Down	345	430	480	557	289	383	76	414	283	302	313	244
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	1495	1476	1740	1899	1970	1459	769	822	1188	1337	1220	883
Belfast	374	453	394	507	446	424	402	475	377	570	353	284
Causeway Coast and Glens	682	595	691	650	876	862	607	620	765	734	709	354
Derry City and Strabane	956	1079	835	876	838	666	536	346	429	569	540	508
Fermanagh and Omagh	723	1278	1037	1537	1322	633	418	944	919	629	603	279
Lisburn and Castlereagh	662	648	702	408	524	431	405	324	388	194	274	226
Mid and East Antrim	549	973	908	765	806	649	413	448	395	402	748	582

Council	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mid Ulster	913	1265	944	1577	1059	815	924	888	712	871	888	797
Newry, Mourne and Down	2041	1871	1526	1880	2492	1521	1844	1916	1645	1703	1390	1162

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to progress the Greenways strategy.
(AQW 1391/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to enhancing citizens' lives and connecting our communities through active travel. While I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints, I am looking carefully at solutions to help support the delivery of projects to meet my priorities of connecting our communities and enhancing our environment.

Over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how the provision of greenways can assist as part of my vision to enable greater sustainable transport options that connect communities and improve lives. Once the budget provides clarity on the resources available, I will be able to firm up my plans and update members.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what investment in cycling infrastructure is currently planned for the next five years.

(AQW 1479/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Over the coming months I will be bringing a clear focus to my priorities including improving connectivity, tackling regional imbalance and promoting sustainable transport to positively impact climate change and make lives better. Once the budget process provides clarity on the resources available I will be able to firm up my plans for investment in cycling infrastructure for the next two years.

However, I want to assure the Member that I am committed to connecting communities and encouraging more active travel to create a greener environment and to tackle the impact of climate change.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department plans to introduce (i) traffic calming measures in the Upper Long Streets, Belfast; and (ii) a yellow box junction at the top of Hillman Street, Belfast.

(AQW 1599/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) Officials have recently inspected Hillman Street, Upper Meadow Street, Spamount Street, Stratheden Street, New Lodge Street, Lepper Street, Sheridan Street, Dawson Street and Kinnard Street, which are all within the area known locally as the 'Upper Long Streets' and noted that traffic calming measures are already in place. Therefore, to address the Member's concerns, I have asked officials from DfI Roads Eastern Division – Network Traffic to make contact to clarify the streets to be assessed.
- (ii) Officials have also recently assessed the junction of Antrim Road with Hillman Street, for the provision of a yellow box road marking. Surveys indicated that traffic flows and the level of delay experienced at this junction were low compared to similar locations throughout Belfast. Therefore, there are currently no plans to introduce a yellow box road marking at this location.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail the cost benefit analysis of the removal and replacement of the original granite kerbs the Lansdowne area in North Belfast; and (ii) for her assessment of whether it is at odds with the Townscape Character outlined in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 1600/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department's current practice and approach when implementing footway resurfacing schemes within the public road boundary, including Conservation Areas, is to remove existing returned kerbs at low volume vehicular accesses and replace them with a lowered kerb access arrangement at the carriageway edge. This is a practice and approach that I have inherited from previous Ministers. This form of construction provides a continuous, smooth transitional surface along the length of the public footway and is one of a number of measures that can be used to create a barrier-free pedestrian environment.

Although a formalised cost / benefit analysis is not carried out in relation to the retention or replacement of granite kerbs, value for money is an important consideration for my officials when delivering resurfacing schemes. The availability of granite kerbs to kerb straight through vehicular entrances is also a critical factor, as we need to retain stocks, to maintain this type of kerb in conservation areas. The safety and maintenance of roads is a priority for my Department.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) why her Department will be removing kerbs in the Lansdowne area, North Belfast; (ii) what her Department's plans are with regards to the existing granite kerbs once they are removed; (iii) how resident notification and engagement was done; (iv) how engagement with other statutory service providers in regards to

service delivery for residents was done; (v) whether other streets in Belfast within the Areas of Townscape Character are at risk of losing existing granite kerbs; and (vi) if so, which streets.

(AQW 1601/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) My Department's current practice and approach when implementing footway resurfacing schemes within the public road boundary, including Conservation Areas, is to remove existing returned kerbs at low volume vehicular accesses and replace them with a lowered kerb access arrangement at the carriageway edge. This form of construction provides a continuous, smooth transitional surface along the length of the public footway and is one of a number of measures that can be used to create a barrier-free pedestrian environment.
- (ii) Any re-useable granite kerbs are brought into our storage yard for re-use, where required, on the public road network, primarily on main roads and in conservation areas.
- (iii) The scheme was programmed for March 2020. However, a gap in the contractor's programme provided an opportunity to bring the scheme forward. Letters were delivered to residents informing them of the planned work on Tuesday 21 January 2020 and the work started on Monday 27 January 2020. While this was planned ahead of my tenure, I wrote to residents on behalf of the Department apologising for the delay in notifying them of the start date of the scheme and for any inconvenience caused.
- (iv) The footway resurfacing scheme was carried out under lane closures, which were published on the Trafficwatch website under "road works". The details can be viewed by other statutory service providers and members of the public. Where road works require a complete closure of a road in Belfast, my Department will consult with Belfast City Council making them aware of the closure and put in place the necessary arrangements to facilitate bin collection. The road in this instance remained open and BCC confirmed bins should have been collected. However, I understand some bins were not collected at the time, but arrangements were put in place to have them collected at a later stage. My officials have been in contact again with BCC and bin collections should now proceed as normal.
- (v) There are no other streets within townscape character areas in the North Belfast area that are currently on my Department's resurfacing programme. There is however, the potential for these to be considered for inclusion in future programmes.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following her statement on 4 February 2020 regarding Electrical Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs), (i) when she expects her Department to complete the review of draft legislation; (ii) when she intends to introduce legislation amending regulations for EAPCs; and (iii) how the legislation drafted by her Department would amend current regulations on (a) registration; (b) licensing; and (c) insurance.

(AQW 1614/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I announced on 4 February 2020 my intention to bring forward as soon as possible, for the Assembly's approval, legislation which will remove the need for EAPCs to be registered and licenced in NI. This will also remove the requirement that the rider must have a driving licence and wear a motorcycle helmet. The requirement to insure an EAPC under the existing legislation will also be removed.

However, EAPC owners/riders should consider the need for insurance that covers areas such as damage, theft, personal injury and liability. Most contents insurance policies that include pedal cycles have a low cover limit, which is likely to be below the value of an EAPC, and unlikely to cover theft away from the home.

My officials are completing the review of the draft legislation and I will shortly submit an SL1 to the DFI Committee for its consideration. Subject to the Committee's response my officials will make the necessary Statutory Rule. I will then ask the Assembly Business Office to allocate a date and time for an Affirmative Resolution debate seeking member's approval of the Statutory Rule which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope in NI.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface the main road between Sturgan Brae and Silverbridge.

(AQW 1693/17-22)

Ms Mallon: You will appreciate that my Department continues to operate in a very challenging budgetary environment. However, subject to the availability of funding, my Department plans to resurface a 1,500m length of the B30 from Longfield Road to Mullaghans Road, in the 2020/2021 financial year. I have already raised the need for further funding for the next financial year with the Finance Minister in order to ensure these resurfacing projects and others can be delivered.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Lower Newtown Road, Cloughogue.

(AQW 1694/17-22)

Ms Mallon: You will appreciate that my Department continues to operate in a very challenging budgetary environment. However, subject to the availability of funding, my Department plans to resurface a 1km length of the Lower Newtown Road in the 2020/2021 financial year. I have already raised the need for further funding for the next financial year with the Finance Minister in order to ensure these resurfacing projects and others can be delivered.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface the fourth street at Barcroft Park, Newry.
(AQW 1695/17-22)

Ms Mallon: You will appreciate that my Department continues to operate in a very challenging budgetary environment. However, subject to the availability of funding, my Department plans to resurface the fourth Street in Barcroft Park during the 2020/2021 financial year. I have already raised the need for further funding for the next financial year with the Finance Minister in order to ensure these resurfacing projects and others can be delivered.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to implement appropriate traffic calming measures at the crossroads in Meigh, Co. Armagh.
(AQW 1696/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department recognises the importance of traffic calming and road safety measures and is committed to exploring solutions that deliver better for communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland. For consistency and fairness, the current criteria through which potential schemes are assessed, include factors such as speed and volume of traffic, the most up to date three years personal injury collision statistics and environmental factors, such as the proximity of public buildings and the nature of the road which is a through route.

You will be aware that, following requests from local elected representatives, an assessment has been completed at Meigh crossroads. However, it did not score highly enough against current criteria to warrant further development and potential inclusion in a future works programme.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface (i) Beechwood Avenue; and (ii) Beechwood Gardens, Bangor.
(AQW 1698/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Beechwood Avenue or Beechwood Gardens, Bangor. As with all public roads, the condition of Beechwood Avenue and Beechwood Gardens will be monitored during periodic maintenance inspections and they may be included in future works programmes. In the meantime, any recordable defects will be noted and actioned for repair in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have raised the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to maintain our roads and other growing pressures facing my Department. I will consider my options following confirmation of the next budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Meadowbank Avenue, Donaghadee.
(AQW 1700/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Unfortunately, due to severe budget constraints, my Department has had to restrict its resurfacing work programmes across Northern Ireland. It is acknowledged that resurfacing in Meadowbank Avenue is required and this location will be considered for inclusion in future work programmes. In the meantime any actionable defects will be noted for repair, in line with the Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have raised the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance, in order to maintain our roads to a better standard and deal with the other growing pressures facing my Department. I will consider my options following confirmation of the next budget.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there is a preferred route for phase 2 of the Glider.
(AQW 1703/17-22)

Ms Mallon: A north-south Glider route is one of the projects identified for inclusion in the Belfast Region City Deal. The next stages will require close working across all departments and with the other Belfast Region City Deal partners. The work will include reaching agreement on funding and on which projects are most capable of delivering the City Deal objectives.

To that end, my officials are working closely with the councils and other partners to take forward a feasibility and options appraisal, which will help in identifying route options. We are aiming to have this work completed by the end of this calendar year.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether employees in MOT Centres are being compensated appropriately for working on Sundays.
(AQW 1704/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The decision to work on Sundays to facilitate extended opening hours is purely on a voluntary basis and there are many reasons why some staff either choose not to do so or are unable to do so.

Those who do work on Sundays are compensated in line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions of service.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she will improve the safety of (i) walkers; and (ii) cyclists on the road network.

(AQW 1705/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to enhancing citizens' lives and to connecting our communities through active travel and I am very keen to increase the proportion of everyday journeys made by walking and cycling across Northern Ireland. Over the coming months I want to see what I can do to remove the barriers for people who want to walk and cycle more. Any decisions I make will be in the context of any budget settlement.

In recent years my Department has funded several campaigns aimed at improving attitudes and raising mutual respect between drivers and pedestrians and between drivers and cyclists. These television campaigns, supported by social media, radio, outdoor, press releases, remind drivers of the vulnerability of pedestrians and cyclists and advise all three road user groups to pay attention when sharing the road with other road users. All of these campaigns carry the core message "Respect Everyone's Journey".

The campaigns encourage drivers to give extra consideration to more vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists. Likewise, the messages also encourage pedestrians and cyclists to increase their own safety by behaving appropriately on the road.

My Department also has an annual programme of safety measures aimed at improving road safety and traffic progression for all road users, including those who choose to walk and cycle.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she will put in place for roads affected by coastal erosion.

(AQW 1706/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs commissioned a report entitled "Baseline Study and Gap Analysis of Coastal Erosion Risk Management NI", in December 2018. The report identified those areas where it is considered that coastal erosion may pose a significant risk that needs to be managed, based on the potential impact to land, property and infrastructure.

We also have an established inspection regime for the public road network and enhanced arrangements for areas vulnerable to storm impacts. For example, the A2 Coast Road has a detailed 'Coast Road Management Plan' and we have carried out a study of road locations in the Ards and North Down area that were at risk from coastal erosion to identify and prioritise any remedial work. In addition, sea defences, which support the public road, are inspected annually and after significant storms. These inspections help to inform both the routine maintenance programme as well identifying the need for larger capital investment. I will continue to work collaboratively with the DAERA Minister and other parties to find sustainable solutions for coastal communities.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister for Infrastructure how she intends to address the backlog in street light repairs, some of which have been repeatedly reported.

(AQW 1718/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Due to budgetary constraints, my Department has been operating a limited street lighting maintenance service since 1 October 2019. As a result outages are taking an average of 8-10 weeks to repair.

I welcome the additional £3m allocation made to my Department by the Finance Minister and I am keen to allocate all of that available funding, after fully funding the winter gritting services up to 31 March, to fix broken Street Lights and improve road surfaces by filling potholes in all four divisions.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure when proposed changes to requirements for pre-1980 registered vehicles to have MOTs will be introduced.

(AQW 1728/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a disparity as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest (VHIs) are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following lobbying from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be introduced here.

This is an issue that I wish to examine carefully, and I will consider the consultation responses before I decide how best to proceed.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will survey the A22 Killinchy Road/Comber Road/Killyleagh Road, with a view to reducing the speed limit and improving road safety.

(AQW 1729/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's engineering officials completed a Route Improvement Study on this road in March 2018.

Automatic speed and traffic counters were positioned at a number of locations along the road and a review of collision history was also undertaken. I can advise that the outcome of the review, which was conducted in conjunction with the PSNI, was that the existing speed limit remains appropriate along this stretch of the A22.

I can confirm that officials, along with the PSNI, will continue to monitor this busy part of the road network.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will survey the A23 Belfast Road/Moneyreagh Road/Ballygowan Road, with a view to reducing the speed limit and improving road safety.
(AQW 1730/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have asked my officials to carry out a review of the A23, to assess the appropriateness of the current speed limit. However, as this will involve formal speed surveys, this will take some time to complete.

I have asked officials to correspond directly with you, when the outcome is known.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of the safety standard of wire rope safety barriers for road users.
(AQW 1742/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Safety barriers are installed to help keep vehicles from striking objects on the side of the road, leaving the road or colliding with each other head-on. My Department adheres to the current European standards, contained in EN1317, used across Great Britain, Ireland and many other parts of Europe, when installing any type of safety barrier - including wire rope systems. These standards take account of current best practice, safety, value for money and environmental considerations.

Wire rope systems installed to these standards have to meet numerous performance requirements, including the need for the system to be subject to crash tests. Various research carried out to date has concluded that wire rope systems perform well when impacted by errant vehicles and are no more dangerous to vulnerable road users, than other types of deformable safety barriers, more commonly used across the road network.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to release funding for the Lagan pedestrian and cycle bridge.
(AQW 1743/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge is one of three projects being taken forward by my Department as part of the Belfast City Region Deal. Outline Business Cases for all projects are to be submitted by spring 2020 to allow Belfast Region City Deal partners to consider priorities and funding.

The approval to proceed with the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge and the budget to deliver it will also be subject to Executive approval. I remain committed to supporting the delivery of City Deals that will enhance our economy and increase opportunities for our communities.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the 3-five-10 plan for walking, cycling and public transport.
(AQW 1744/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The proposed 3-five-10 strategic framework was a policy announcement by my predecessor in January 2017. It was not developed in the absence of Ministers.

Over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how best to deliver on my active and sustainable travel ambitions. I am committed to connecting communities and encouraging more active travel to create a greener environment and to tackle the impact of climate change.

Any decisions I make will be in the context of the budget settlement.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will install speed ramps at (i) Ballylifford Primary School; (ii) Derrychrin Primary School; and (iii) Drummullan Primary School.
(AQW 1774/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has provided a number of traffic management measures on Ballinderry Bridge Road, Ballylifford, including flashing school signs, high friction surfacing, and yellow KEEP CLEAR markings and zig zags at the school frontage. Under current policy, traffic calming in the form of vertical speed measures (e.g. speed ramps), is normally restricted to residential streets/developments/estates and not used on roads whose primary function is to facilitate through traffic, where there is no convenient alternative route. As this particular location carries traffic volumes of over 5000 vehicles per day, it would not be suitable for his type of measure. . .

In November 2019, my officials presented the 2020 -2022 Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSM) Programme to Mid Ulster District Council. It included a traffic calming scheme on the Drumenny Road at Derrychrin Primary School. The delivery of the scheme during this period will be subject to successful completion of the consultation process and the availability of funding.

An assessment for a traffic calming scheme on the Moneyhaw Road in Drummullan has been completed. However, it did not rank as highly as other potential schemes in the Mid Ulster Council area. While I would like to do more in relation to improving road safety within our communities and in the vicinity of schools, the severe budget constraints I have inherited limits my capacity to do so. I have already raised my concerns about funding pressures and its impact on my Department's services with the Finance Minister in the hope that we can address this going forward.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail potential annual recurring costs associated with moving Half Fare SmartPass to full fare concession.[R]

(AQW 1775/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The potential annual recurring costs associated with moving half fare SmartPass to full fare concession based on existing levels of usage are in excess of £1 million, which would take the full cost of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme to the region of £52 million per annum. The calculation of additional cost is caveated as this figure can be affected by a number of factors including the number of people who hold a half fare SmartPass and their pattern of usage; the rate of reimbursement to the service provider and public transport fare increases. It is highly likely that the recurring additional costs would be significantly higher than £1million based on the experience of Gilder where the result of introducing free travel for half fare SmartPass holders has been a substantial increase in patronage by half fare SmartPass holders.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many street lights in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area remain out of operation six months after being initially reported.

(AQW 1781/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand the concerns of the public affected by street light outages and am working with my Department to address this issue as quickly as possible. Unfortunately as a result of severe budget cuts, my Department has had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result priority had to be given to hazardous and group outages and other outages are taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired.

In the Ards and North Down Borough Council area there are 13 street lights that remain out of operation over 6 months after defects were initially reported.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I am pleased that this need has been recognised and welcome the recent additional allocation made to my Department. I am keen to allocate all available funding, after fully funding the winter gritting services up to 31 March, to fix broken Street Lights and improve road surfaces by filling potholes in all four divisions.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department plans to cooperate with the relevant authorities in the Republic of Ireland on the future of the Enterprise rail service, including new rolling stock and electrification.

(AQW 1792/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The "New Decade: New Approach" sets out an ambitious agenda for North South connectivity. This includes joint considerations through the NSMC of the feasibility of a high-speed rail; connection between Belfast, Dublin and Cork. In addition "New Decade: New Approach" also sets out the potential for investment in a range of capital projects including the Better Connecting Dublin and Belfast study which focusses on the Enterprise.

Pursuing that agenda in cooperation with the Irish Government within the resources available will be my priority. I will continue through the NSMC to explore how we advance and build on the ambitions of "New Decade: New Approach".

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether Translink has assessed whether existing rolling stock can be converted to non-fossil fuel power sources.

(AQW 1793/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have an ambitious vision for a low carbon future where we make low emission public transport available to people and communities across Northern Ireland. This is essential if we are to deliver on our Programme for Government ambition, connecting people and communities to opportunities whilst playing our part in tackling the climate emergency which is the single greatest global challenge that we face. Realising that ambition is likely to require significant resources and the pace at which I can deliver this change will be determined by the budget made available to my Department.

In respect of converting the existing public transport bus fleet to non-fossil fuel power sources it is possible but would be extremely challenging as all vehicles would be required to be recertified. Given the relatively short asset life of a bus, it is more effective to replace existing vehicles with new fuel cell or battery electric vehicles.

On rail, there is the potential of using hybrid technology conversions on the existing fleet however, like the bus fleet, the most effective way of delivering zero emission rail operations is to employ either fuel cell or battery electric propulsion on new replacement rolling stock as the fleet comes to the end of its useful life. I am committed to exploring options to deliver secure, safe, cleaner, sustainable public transport.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what support is currently available to local councils for installing new electric car infrastructure.

(AQW 1794/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Road to Zero Strategy outlines how the UK Government will support the transition to zero emission road transport and reduce emissions from conventional vehicles during the transition. The Office for Low Emission Vehicles continues to provide a broad range of funding UK wide including Plug-in grant for cars, vans, taxis and motorcycles, the provision of grants for home, work and on-street residential charging infrastructure and a £400 million infrastructure

investment fund to support private sector investment in charging infrastructure by providing greater access to finance on a commercial basis.

The UK Transport Secretary also announced on 21 January 2020 that government funding UK-wide will be doubled to £10 million for the installation of charge points on residential streets next year.

My officials liaise regularly with councils and have recently met with a number of councils, including Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, to provide advice and guidance on a range of e-car related matters including charge point infrastructure. My officials will continue to provide advice and guidance to councils as requested as I am keen to see the electric car infrastructure network improved.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed development plans at Lisnisky Lane, Craigavon in relation to congestion at the entrance to Craigavon Area Hospital.

(AQW 1817/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department, in conjunction with the Hospital Trust and two Developers of land on the opposite side of Lisnisky Lane from the Hospital, have been exploring the possibility of delivering a new secondary access to the Hospital from Lisnisky Lane. A Planning Application will be required for this access and its delivery will be subject to the availability of funding from all parties involved.

This secondary access will reduce congestion at the main entrance to the Hospital and on the Lurgan to Portadown road. Due to the involvement of third parties and statutory processes, it is not currently possible to specify a timescale for the delivery of this access.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the flood mitigation measures proposed for Drumahoe following the floods of 2017.

(AQW 1821/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The feasibility study for Drumahoe has recently been completed. The proposed scheme involves the construction of approximately 1,700 metres of flood defences, the replacement of a culvert and surface water drainage improvements.

The next stage is to test the proposals from a value for money and deliverability perspective and this work is now in hand. I am keen that it is brought to a swift conclusion and hope to be able to provide a further update on the timing for this important scheme in the coming weeks.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many people are employed to fix street lighting in the Northern Division.

(AQW 1839/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As a result of severe budget constraints, my Department has had to restrict its street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland with priority given to hazardous electrical defects and group outages. Consequently, there has been one street lighting electrician available to carry out outage repairs in Northern Division, although on occasions he was required to work in other Council areas.

My Department has very recently secured a limited amount of funding for winter gritting service, street lighting repairs and pothole repairs. This will help to address the backlog of broken street lights across Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much has been spent on contractors to address the problem of faulty street lighting in Northern Division, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 1840/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The budget allocated to Northern Division for the repair of defective street lights during the 2019/20 financial year was £261,000, which is slightly less than one third of the previous year's allocation. By the end of September 2019 this budget had been fully committed. However, payments have since been made for work instructed or completed before then.

Payments made to contractors in Northern Division in each of the last 12 months are as follows: 2019 February £96,000; March £122,000; April £1,000; May £126,000; June £39,000; July £60,000; August £19,000; September £75,000; October £167,000; November £34,000; December £45,000 and 2020 January £25,000.

The payments made to contractors in 2019/20 exceed the allocated budget for the year. This is because some of these payments were for work that was undertaken in the previous financial year and were accrued in our accounts.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many street lights are out in Northern Division; and (ii) the average time taken to fix a street light once a fault has been reported.

(AQW 1841/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There are 3,798 street lighting outages reported on the street lighting management system in Northern Division. Due to budgetary constraints, my Department had been operating a limited street lighting maintenance service since 1 October 2019 with priority given to hazardous electrical defects and group outages. As a result non-hazardous outages are taking an average of 10-12 weeks to repair.

However, I welcome the recent additional £3m allocation made to my Department by the Finance Minister and I have allocated funding, after fully funding the winter gritting services up to 31 March, to fix broken Street Lights and improve road surfaces by filling potholes in all four divisions. In Roads Northern Division, the estimated cost to fix all street light outages by 31 March, is £375,000.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's flood mitigation measures in coastal areas of North Down.

(AQW 1844/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department is responsible for the inspection and maintenance of approximately 26 kilometres of sea defences in Northern Ireland. Approximately 350 metres of these sea defences are located at Kinnegar in North Down.

My officials have worked with partner organisations to develop a coastal flooding emergency response plan. This plan details the arrangements for a co-ordinated multi-agency emergency response to coastal flooding in Northern Ireland, including any vulnerable locations in North Down, such as parts of Holywood, Bangor and Donaghadee.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on when the North West Transport Hub will be fully completed, including the active and sustainable travel centre.

[R]

(AQW 1848/17-22)

Ms Mallon: European funding of the project requires the Hub to be fully operational by 31st December 2020. Phase 1 of the project was completed in October 2019 with the opening of the old Waterside Railway Station. The second phase, which will see the opening of the sustainable travel centre, park and ride facilities and bus drop off facilities remains ahead of this schedule with completion due in the summer of this year.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of key fobs registered for use at each of the Translink secure cycle shelters.

[R]

(AQW 1849/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since 19 December 2017 Translink have sold 145 key fobs. The registered fobs can be programmed to unlock single sites or more than one site up to all 9 sites. The table below identifies the number of fobs registered for use at each site:

Site	Number of Registered fobs
Lisburn	46
Lanyon	25
Holywood	22
Portadown	8
Holywood Arches	4
Ulster Hospital	1
Dundonald P&R	1
Carrickfergus	1
Colin Connect	0
Multi-Sites	37
Total	145

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail new works planned for the Lisnaskea area over the next two years.
(AQW 1872/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department undertakes a regular programme of routine maintenance, such as grass cutting, gully emptying and patching. However, it has been assumed that your question refers to structural maintenance resurfacing works in the Lisnaskea area. Within County Fermanagh, details of planned schemes due to be completed during the current financial year can be found in the Council report previously presented to Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (see link below):

- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/annual-report-to-fermanagh-omagh-district-council-2019.pdf>

Budget allocations for the incoming 2020/21 financial year have still to be confirmed, and consequently our works programmes for the Council area have still to be agreed.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the section of proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor, from the junction with the A4 to the Republic of Ireland near Aughnacloy, remains within the overall scheme.

(AQW 1873/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I can confirm that the A5 Western Transport Corridor project includes (as Phase 3) the section between Ballygawley and the border at Aughnacloy. The addendum to the Environment Statement for the project, envisages that this final phase of the scheme could be constructed between 2026 and 2028, subject to the availability of funding and completion of the statutory processes.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of HGVs which were detected and deemed to be unroadworthy; and (ii) their countries of origin, in the last three years.

(AQW 1907/17-22)

Ms Mallon: During the period 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2019, the Driver and Vehicle Agency conducted technical roadside inspections on 7,208 HGVs of which 1,332 vehicles were deemed to be unroadworthy. Their countries of origin are shown in the table below.

County of origin	Number of unroadworthy HGVs detected
Belgium	2
Bulgaria	6
Ireland	313
Malta	1
Netherlands	1
Poland	2
UK	1,007
Total	1,332

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to meet the 2014 target of 500 electric vehicle charging points.

(AQW 1909/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There are currently 320 22kWh (fast) charge points at 160 locations and a further 17 50kWh DC rapid charge points in Northern Ireland, which are owned, operated and maintained by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). In addition, 95 7kWh charge points (54 charge posts) were installed by public sector organisations including health trusts, councils, government departments, who availed of grant funding from the UK Office for Low Emission Vehicles in 2014. Whilst these charge points were primarily for use by fleet and staff owned vehicles, a number of these organisations agreed that their charge points, where accessible, could be used by the general public when visiting their sites or availing of their facilities. Charge point owners made 40 charge points (23 charge posts) available for use by the general public.

My Department is not aware of an explicit target of 500 charge points set in 2014. However, I fully recognise the importance of having modern, reliable public electric vehicle charging infrastructure in providing confidence for users of ultra-low emission vehicles and in respect of the connectivity improvements this would bring. I am committed to seeing this infrastructure increased as part of my Department's climate change action and I have met with the DAERA Minister to begin working collaboratively to achieve this. My Department will continue to closely monitor funding opportunities for the installation of additional charge point infrastructure and will work with commercial providers to ensure that the installation of any additional charge point infrastructure remains fit for purpose commensurate with growth.

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to increase the number of electric vehicles sold.

(AQW 1910/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In the coming months, I will be working to identify actions to support the decarbonisation of transport and infrastructure services that will help to reduce carbon emissions. I will also quickly determine my longer term priorities to address the climate emergency. I recently met with Minister Poots MLA and announced a commitment for our two departments i.e. DfI and DAERA to work collaboratively to promote the use of electric vehicles and specifically to improve the charge point network across the North.

The Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) provides a range of e-car related grants towards the purchase of electric vehicles including home, workplace and residential charge points to support the uptake of electric vehicles. The UK government recently announced that the ban in the UK on the selling of new diesel and petrol vehicles, including for the first time the selling of new hybrid vehicles, would be brought forward from 2040 to 2035 and would come even earlier than 2035, if possible. The UK-wide 'Road to Zero' strategy sets out a number of targets and actions in order to achieve an increase in electric vehicles on a UK-wide basis.

My Department closely monitors the range of e-car related grants and provides advice and guidance to support the uptake and the transition to zero emissions.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on her Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.

(AQW 1917/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's Brexit preparations support the work of the Executive's sub-committee on EU Exit Issues (of which I am a member). The sub-committee will be a key mechanism in the co-ordination of our response to the outworkings of the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister have written to the Prime Minister to seek a meeting to discuss his Government's commitments in the New Decade, New Approach deal, including those associated with the Protocol as well as the differing statements by the UK Government and the European Commission on the implications of the Protocol for the movement of goods from GB to NI.

Specifically, in Department for Infrastructure preparation terms, work is focused in two key areas:

- by identifying key Departmental issues within the wider context of Northern Ireland 'asks', to ensure the continued delivery of Transport, Water and Planning services and to ensure that North/South operations are underpinned by harmonised and compatible regulations and practices.
- and secondly by ensuring a capability to effectively contribute to Future Economic Partnership negotiations. My officials are engaging with Whitehall counterparts and are working as part of a cross departmental team to influence negotiations by ensuring the NI implications are strongly articulated.

Presently, there are 19 people across my Department spending between 50% and 100% of their time on this work.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the progress and completion date of phase three of the upgrade of the Derry to Coleraine/Belfast rail line; and (ii) for her assessment of the importance of the line for the North West region.

(AQW 1920/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the significant interest in the future delivery of Phase 3 upgrade of the Derry –Coleraine railway line. I am committed to addressing regional imbalance and better connecting communities across the North. As you will be aware, I have inherited severe budgetary constraints in my department. Despite these challenges, I can assure you that I am committed to working to find solutions that will deliver for our communities and improve lives. I am currently assessing the pressures across my department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade:

- (i) New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead.
- (ii) Enhancing connectivity to and from the North West is a key priority for me. This is not an end in itself. It is about addressing regional imbalance and playing our part in unlocking the economic potential of the North West to transform lives and improve health and well-being. The Derry to Coleraine / Belfast rail line will be increasingly important to the realization of that ambition. Building the connectivity of the North West will require a continued commitment to addressing the roads infrastructure deficit in the west. However, I am equally focussed on building the connectivity of the North West through public transport and active travel, including the opportunities for rail. This is essential to ensure we play our part in tackling the climate emergency, which is the single greatest global challenge we face. Putting more and more cars on the road is no longer a viable solution to our transport needs. In that regard, our rail network, whilst relatively small, presents a unique opportunity to improve the sustainability of our transport operations.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether Translink will conduct a review of (i) evening; and (ii) early morning bus provision in the Derry city area.

(AQW 1921/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Foyle Metro was introduced in September 2017 and during the first eight months of this financial year, patronage on the stage carriage urban network in the greater Foyle area has grown by 3.6% from 405,000 passengers to almost 420,000. Translink monitors service provision in all areas, including Derry City. Translink will continue to review and enhance these services to meet changing demand, community and business needs in consultation with local stakeholders e.g. Derry City Council and Ulster University at Magee.

My Department is also preparing a transport plan for the North West region and, specifically, the Derry & Strabane council areas. The plan is to explore in more detail a number of possible bus improvements, such as (1) Improve limited stop services to key hubs; (2) Park & Ride and Park & Share opportunities; (3) Improvements to Foyle Metro with a flagship high quality cross-city route; and (4) Integration of passenger transport services including innovative transport models such as 'ride & share' to provide viable transport where there are low passenger numbers.

I am currently assessing the pressures I have inherited across my Department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget available for the period ahead. Despite these challenges, I am committed to addressing regional imbalance and better connecting communities across the North and to finding solutions that will deliver for our communities and improve lives.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the role of blocked gulleys in flooding in Derry city, whether her Department (i) has plans for the clearing of them; and (ii) will investigate the cause of the regular city centre flooding at the junction of Lower Strand Road and Great James Street.

(AQW 1922/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There are approximately 48,000 gullies within the Derry City and Strabane District Council area. In recent years as a result of budget constraints, the Department has had to reduce the frequency of the routine urban gully clearing.

I understand you have been in contact with the local Section Engineer for Derry and Strabane and provided details of locations of particular concern to you. Officials will investigate these areas and programme any gully cleaning or maintenance required, as soon as possible.

My officials are liaising with NI Water colleagues to investigate the cause of the flooding at Lower Strand Road and Great James Street with a view to identifying options for resolving issues as soon as possible.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has plans to increase the rail network.

(AQW 1926/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to improving connectivity for the benefit of our economy and communities across Northern Ireland. In that regard, I am clear that our rail network, whilst relatively small, presents a unique opportunity to improve the sustainability of our transport operations. However given the severe and challenging budget constraints I have inherited, there are significant challenges across my Department.

I will be assessing the pressures across my Department reflecting my priorities, the commitments in the "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. My Department is also developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan which will inform priorities for future development of the main road and rail networks. Tackling regional imbalance and connecting communities are priorities for me.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the current legislation regarding the use of (a) electric scooters/go-peds; and (b) hover boards; and (ii) whether she has any plans to expand the legislation.

(AQW 1930/17-22)

Ms Mallon: You will be aware of my recent announcement to bring forward, as soon as possible, the necessary legislation which will remove Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs) from legislative scope. In relation to electric scooters, go peds and hover boards it is illegal to use these vehicles on public roads in Northern Ireland and at present none of these have been licensed in any part of Great Britain for use in public roads. I have no plans to change this.

I am, however, aware of the ongoing debate in many countries, in particular about the significant increase in the use of electric scooters, mainly in large towns and cities, which has seen a number of fatalities and serious injuries occur of both riders and members of the public. I understand that in GB the Department for Transport, as part of a wider transport review, is considering consulting on the use of electric scooters on public roads.

It is important to consider the potential environmental and health benefits that these types of vehicles can deliver while also being very mindful of the safety implications their use may have for both the rider and wider public. I will ask my officials to keep a watching brief on any developments.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how train and bus stations are prepared for adverse weather, including icy conditions, to ensure the safety of passengers and personnel.

(AQW 1955/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The safety of those using public transport services is of paramount importance to my Department and Translink. Translink has in place a detailed plan of action in order to respond to adverse weather and ensure the safety of passengers and personnel as well as the continued safe operation of bus and rail services. In line with this, arrangements are in place for salting/gritting surfaces at platforms and walkways at bus and rail stations, including unmanned railway halts. Staff clear platforms in snow and icy conditions and, in extreme, conditions they remove snow/ice from the track infrastructure at junction points.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures her Department will take to improve (i) the road surface; and (ii) road safety at the junction of the Farlough, Edendork and Coalisland Roads, County Tyrone.

(AQW 1969/17-22)

Ms Mallon: A junction improvement The A45 Coalisland Road/ C623 Farlough Road junction has been included in the Local Transport and Safety Measures Programme for the Mid Ulster Council since 2015. A detailed design has been completed and cost estimates have been prepared. The scheme, when combined with the necessary resurfacing works, is likely to cost in excess of £300,000. The works would require the relocation of a significant amount of BT apparatus in advance.

I am currently assessing capital pressures across my Department for the period ahead in light of Executive flagship projects commitments in the "New Decade: New Approach" and my Ministerial priorities which include improving lives and tackling regional imbalance. In the interim, routine safety inspections will continue to identify safety related defects for repair in accordance with current maintenance standards.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) what is the status along public roads of local council signage demarcating council boundaries; and (ii) what role, if any, has her Department in the approval, erection or maintenance of such.
(Aqw 1977/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Local Councils provide Council boundary signs, to promote their local areas and to welcome visitors. My Department's role is limited to giving advice aimed at ensuring the signs are provided in a safe manner.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure why the Victoria Meadows development in Magheramason remains unadopted.
(Aqw 1985/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Victoria Meadows has been developed in three phases and remains unadopted, as the developer has not completed the road and sewerage infrastructure to the required standard. The first phase requires completion of minor defects to allow adoption to proceed. Phases two and three require remedial works to the sewerage infrastructure and laying of the final carriageway surface.

My officials continue to work closely with the developer. They are stressing the need for timely and satisfactory completion of the work, to enable the adoption of this development to proceed.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure when the evaluation will take place of the pilot 20 mph zones without self-enforcing engineering measures.
(Aqw 1997/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. I believe that reducing the maximum speed traffic can travel at on some of our roads can help.

My Department is committed to introducing measures that reduce the speed of traffic on our roads. We are currently trialling the effectiveness of 'signed only' 20mph limits, which could be used more widely in appropriate environments, such as residential areas with schools, than would be possible with the current approach of providing 20mph limits along with traffic calming features. I am expecting receipt of the findings of the trial in the next month or so, and I fully intend to see what potential there is, to build on the work already underway.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail plans for the development of a new road safety strategy for 2021 onwards.
(Aqw 1998/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work collaboratively with partners to reduce death and serious injury on our roads.

The current Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy expires in December 2020. The initial work to inform the way forward has commenced, although it is still at an early stage.

Reducing road death and serious injuries is an important aspect of improving wellbeing for all. Therefore I want to take the time to ensure my decision on how we proceed following the expiry of the current Strategy is as informed as possible.

I expect to be in a position to make a decision on the current Strategy's successor later this year.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Active School Travel Programme.
(Aqw 1999/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Active School Travel Programme works with schools to promote and encourage children to travel more actively to school. The programme is designed to show children that active travel is fun, enjoyable and good for the environment. The programme also has a positive impact on physical and mental health.

The Programme is co-funded by my Department and the Public Health Agency at an annual contribution of £200k. Sustrans NI are contracted to deliver the programme on behalf of both organisations. The contract expires in September 2021.

Each year 60 new schools join the three year programme. Sustrans work with these schools to change the culture in order to influence an increase in active travel and a reduction in the dependency on the use of the private car.

For the 2018/19 academic year, figures indicate that the number of children travelling actively³ to school has increased by 49% when compared to the baseline for all schools currently participating in the programme.

As the current contract expires next year, work has commenced to evaluate the programme. When that work is complete I will consider the findings before deciding the way forward. I recognise that more needs to be done to promote active travel with all the health and environmental benefits it brings, especially in the lives of our young people.

3 Walking, cycling, scooting/skating or a park and ride/stride/scoot journey

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will consider reducing the speed limit on roads outside schools to 20 mph when developing her Department's new road safety strategy.

(AQW 2000/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department is committed to introducing measures that reduce the speed of traffic on our roads and in line with the current Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland, my Department is currently trialling an arrangement of signs that is intended to allow the introduction of more part-time 20mph limits at schools. I fully intend to see what potential there is from these trials, to build on the work already underway.

I want to be as informed as possible when making the decision on the way forward when the current Road Safety Strategy expires. Therefore, work has already begun, although it is still at an early stage. The outcome of the trial will help inform this work.

I expect to be in a position to make a decision on the content of the way forward later this year and when the budget made available to my Department is clear.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are plans for the construction of a footpath along the road from Fiveways Roundabout to the road junction at the top of the Camlough Road, Newry.

(AQW 2001/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As you will be aware, there are no footways on this stretch of Craigmore Way, apart from the short stretch between the Camlough Road roundabout and the link road to the railway station. My Department currently has no plans to provide footways on the remaining section of Craigmore Way.

The road is, however, within the development limits for Newry and any development proposals will be expected to include delivery of the stretch of footway fronting the development site.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Narrow Water bridge project.

(AQW 2002/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Fresh Start set out a commitment to Narrow Water Bridge. It is also named in the New Decade, New Approach deal, with the UK Government committing to providing additional financial support for infrastructure delivery to enable the Northern Ireland Executive to invest in a range of potential capital projects such as Narrow Water Bridge. The Irish Government also stated their readiness to jointly progress consideration of options for the development of the Narrow Water Bridge project at the North South Ministerial Council.

I will be reviewing the options that have been considered in respect of future development of Narrow Water in coming weeks. I recognise the local support for a bridge at Narrow Water to link the communities on both sides of the lough and maximise the tourism potential of this cross border region whilst protecting the natural environment in this area of historic and ecological significance. It is a project I will be raising at the earliest opportunity at the NSMC.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will approve a design for the Southern Relief Road that will allow tall ships and other vessels to continue to access Newry Canal up to the Albert Basin.

(AQW 2003/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Whilst the development of the Newry Southern Relief Road is progressing on the basis of a fixed bridge, the option of an opening bridge has not been ruled out at this stage. The fixed bridge option would provide approximately 12m vertical clearance (air-draft) over the canal. However, providing unrestricted vertical clearance through the option of an opening bridge would increase costs by up to £25m.

Key to the final engineering decision on the bridge structure will be the views of stakeholders, such as Newry Mourne & Down District Council, elected representatives, Historic Environment Division (DFC) and local interest groups.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans there are for improved residential parking at Priors Lea, Holywood.

(AQW 2005/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My officials have advised there have been numerous requests and site meetings with public representatives and the residents of Priors Lea over the past number of years, regarding requests for additional parking and a new access road on an adjacent grassed area.

Parking facilities are already available adjacent to Prior's Lea on Firmount Crescent and Palace Grove and observations indicate that traffic progression is not a significant problem on the roads in the adjacent estate. I am also advised the area has a good safety record.

Under these circumstances, I am sorry to advise that my Department has no plans to provide additional parking facilities to improve residents' parking in the Priors Lea area of Holywood.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the funding for (a) Dial a Lift; and (b) Disability Action Transport Scheme; and (ii) the amount of people who benefit from both schemes annually.

(AQW 2030/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) In the 2019/20 financial year, the total funding provided by my Department to support the delivery of Dial-a-Lift (DAL) and the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) was £2.4 million and £2.1 million respectively.
- (ii) Figures for the number of people who used these services in 2019/20 are not yet available, however the total number of DAL and DATS users in 2018/19 was 7,493. Whilst quantifying the number of users of the schemes is relatively straightforward, it is likely to be the case that the amount of people who benefit from these schemes is significantly higher, given the wider social, economic and environmental benefits associated with DAL and DATS.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether public transport will access green bus funds from the Department for Transport.

(AQW 2031/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Green Bus fund, which has now been succeeded by the Ultra-Low Emission Bus scheme, is a Department for Transport (DfT) initiative that provides support to transport operators in England. However, my Department continues to explore funding opportunities and was recently successful in securing over £1m in funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) for a pilot project for the procurement of three hydrogen fuel cell buses.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the multi-year budgets, identified within New Decade, New Approach, will be available for departmental services where strategic spending is inhibited by annual budgets, such as public transport and road maintenance.

(AQW 2032/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I welcome the NDNA Agreement and the commitment to moving to multiyear budgets.

Annual budgets do not lend themselves to the requirements of infrastructure development in a department such as my own. Multi-year budgets should provide consistency and financial security which will greatly assist long-term planning for major capital projects

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the grant each Rural Community Transport Partnership will receive in 2020/21, broken down by (i) the overall grant; and (ii) user of the service.

(AQW 2038/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I clearly recognise the important contribution that community transport makes towards our Programme for Government outcomes and ambitions by connecting some of our most vulnerable people and rural communities. However, while I am committed to finding solutions to protect and maintain rural community transport services, severe constraints in my Department's budgets over recent years has resulted in reduced funding not only to community transport but across my Department. This has created significant challenges and I will be considering the funding of community transport going forward alongside the full range of pressures across my Department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. I have already met with the Finance Minister outlining the pressures across my Department and emphasising the need for the vital investment in our infrastructure so we can deliver critical services that connect our communities across the North.

Until the Budget has been announced, I cannot give an indication of what the allocation will be for the Rural Community Transport Partnerships in 2020/21.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how levels of funding allocated to individual Rural Community Transport Partnerships, through the Rural Transport Fund, are determined.

(AQW 2039/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department provided £2.4 million funding across 8 Community Transport Partnerships in 2019/20. The basis for this funding allocation was established in 2015/16 when the Departments budgets were significantly reduced and cuts had to be made across the Department. At that time account was taken of the requirements set out by each of the Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP) in their Business Plans, their financial position (specifically the scale of their financial reserves) and the costs incurred by each partnership. This give rise to a specific percentage of the Rural Transport Fund being allocated to each partnership. The 2019/20 baseline allocations for each RCTP is set out in the table below.

RCTPs	Baseline Allocation 2019/20	% of overall Funding on Baseline Allocation 2019/20
CDM	£406,899.89	18.2
DCT	£297,120.15	13.3
Easilink	£306,723.34	13.7
FCT	£321,979.69	14.4
LVRT	£115,330.46	5.2

RCTPs	Baseline Allocation 2019/20	% of overall Funding on Baseline Allocation 2019/20
NCCT	£384,894.07	17.2
SACT	£117,871.49	5.3
Southern Area Partnership	£285,261.61	12.8
Totals	£2,236,080.70*	100

* CDM, Easilink and NCCT each received additional payments of £3,150, £67,500 and £82,500 respectively which increased RTF spend to £2.4 million in 2019/20.

I clearly recognise the important contribution that rural community transport schemes make towards delivering Programme for Government ambitions and connecting some of the most vulnerable people and rural communities, therefore I am committed to finding solutions to protect and maintain rural community transport services. However, we all need to recognise that the benefits of community transport go well beyond my Department, illustrated by the fact that health-related trips currently account for one quarter of all community transport journeys. At a time of constrained budgets, delivering my ambitions for community transport will require innovation, greater collaboration and cross-departmental working.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the extent of monitoring carried out on Rural Community Transport Partnership to ensure that standards are at a requisite level.
(AQW 2040/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The standards that my Department set for each Rural Community Transport Partnership are set out in the Acceptance Form for Standard Terms and Conditions of Rural Transport Fund Grant, which is completed annually. This agreement states that the grant must be used solely for the purposes intended and in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of Grant.

My Department monitors adherence to this by:

- Undertaking spot-checks which are primarily designed to ensure that the services being funded are being delivered as agreed;
- Verification visits which are office-based checks whereby the visiting officer from the Department completes monitoring checks on booking schedules and the policies and procedures of the organisation which will include financial processes and transactions;
- Reviewing monthly statistics provided by each RCTP to demonstrate the utilisation of funding, which includes the amount of trips delivered each month broken down by the trip purpose and the characteristics of the individuals using the services; and
- Reviewing each RCTPs annual audited accounts.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the level of funding per head of rural population by Rural Community Transport Partnership area, allocated for the year 2019/20.
(AQW 2041/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In the 2019/20 financial year, the total funding provided by my Department to Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) to support the delivery of Dial-a-Lift (DAL) services in rural areas was £2.4 million. In addition to this my department provided £2.1 million funding for the delivery of the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS), which is delivered by a number of RCTPs in the urban areas that they cover.

This translates to a level of funding per head of the rural population as set out in the table below. However, a metric of funding per head of rural population is not particularly useful as services provided by RCTPs are not open to all of those resident in the geographic area covered by a partnership. DAL and DATS services are accessible transport options for people with a disability or mobility difficulties and/or for those who are unable to use, or have difficulty accessing public transport. The DAL scheme is specifically focused on those who live in rural areas who do not have access to a car.

RCTP	*Total RCTP Area Population (2018)	Grant Funding Awarded for DAL 2018/19	Rural Spend per Head
CDM Community Transport	107037	£431,533.00	£4.03
Down District Accessible Transport	91193	£312,758.00	£3.43
Southern Area Partnership	166661	£300,275.00	£1.80
Easilink Rural Transport	86225	£322,867.00	£3.74
Fermanagh Rural Transport	50520	£338,926.00	£6.71

RCTP	*Total RCTP Area Population (2018)	Grant Funding Awarded for DAL 2018/19	Rural Spend per Head
Lagan Valley Community Transport	52779	£121,400.00	£2.30
North Coast Community Transport	113679	£405,152.00	£3.56
South Antrim Community Transport	70620	£124,075.00	£1.76

* Figures are for the midyear 2018 estimates which takes into account births, deaths and migration from the 2011 census <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/2018-mid-year-population-estimates-northern-ireland>

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure why planning applications for battery energy storage facilities are regarded as non-generational, whereas in the rest of the UK they are regarded as generating facilities.

(AQW 2054/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The terms “electricity generating station” or “battery energy storage facility” are not defined in the Planning Act (NI) 2011 or The Planning (Development Management) Regulations (NI) 2015.

Any application for planning permission will be considered by the relevant planning authority on the basis of the type and scale of development proposed, and against the requirements of extant policy and legislation.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of (i) current planning policy regarding the cumulative impact of successive applications in an area in respect of noise and visual amenity; and (ii) the succession of applications within the vicinity of Kells electricity substation.

(AQW 2055/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Current regional planning policy for assessing development proposals is set out in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and is supported by supplementary planning guidance. This provides a robust policy framework against which to assess planning applications of all types, including renewable energy development. The SPPS includes environmental and amenity considerations such as noise, visual amenity and landscape character and cumulative impact as material planning considerations for planning decisions. In relation to noise, this will be informed through consultation with the relevant council’s Environmental Health Department. The relevance and weight to be attributed to each of the material considerations, including cumulative impact, is a matter for the planning authority to determine in the particular case.

My Department is currently processing the Kells solar farm which is within the vicinity of Kells electricity substation. I am also aware of a planning application for a battery storage facility near to the electricity substation that was approved on appeal by the Planning Appeals Commission in November 2019. I will consider the materiality of these applications and any other relevant applications when determining the solar farm application.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will consider upgrading the Lurganboy Road, Castlederg.

(AQW 2073/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I can advise that almost 320 metres of the urban section of the Lurganboy Road was resurfaced during the 2017/18 financial year and a further 2180 metres was surfaced dressed during the 2018/19 year. The Lurganboy road is in a similar condition to other “C” class roads within the district and there are currently no plans to undertake further improvements beyond routine maintenance repairs.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will include the part of Lurganboy Road, Castlederg, beyond the town limits to the border with Co.Donegal, on the winter gritting schedule.

(AQW 2074/17-22)

Ms Mallon: During the winter season my Department grits approximately 28% of the public road network, enabling 80% of traffic on our roads to move with care during periods of adverse winter weather.

One of the main criteria for inclusion of a road in the scheduled gritted network, is that it should carry more than 1,500 vehicles per day. The rural section of the Lurganboy Road currently does not meet this threshold. However, the Castlefin Road to the border, which runs parallel and in reasonable proximity to Lurganboy Road, is gritted along its entire length and provides an alternative gritted route.

I would like to be able to expand our gritting service to many other routes but it is simply not feasible to do this at present, due to the severe budget constraints and many other pressures faced by my Department. This is an issue I hope to address with Executive Colleagues.

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps she has taken to ensure that the Airporter has the same automatic scanning hardware used on Translink bus driver consoles for those who avail of the concessionary fares scheme. (AQW 2075/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Airporter is not currently a member of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme. The operator has recently contacted my Department to express an interest in re-joining the scheme. My officials have met with them to highlight the audit requirements of the scheme, which includes the necessity of a ticketing system.

In developing the new Translink Ticketing project, my Department had ensured that the new system will be accessible to public transport operators other than Translink. This scheme is expected to be rolled out on all Translink services late 2021, after which private operators can be added. Airporter have been made aware of these timescales and my officials continue to discuss issues with them.

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to fund the upgrade of the A2 Buncrana Road. (AQW 2076/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise that many in the local community support the upgrade of the A2 Buncrana Road scheme. Improving connectivity, both in terms of our road and public transport networks, is vitally important if we, as an Executive, are to grow our economy and improve well-being in line with our aspirations. The A2 Buncrana Road is a key transport corridor and improvements would improve connectivity with Donegal and accessibility in the northwest of the city. Following public consultations in May 2018 and March 2019, we continue to develop a preferred solution.

I have already expressed to the Minister for Finance the severe budgetary constraints I have inherited in my Department and the need for greater investment in infrastructure in the forthcoming budget. Once the budget is clear, I will be able to set out clearly what projects I can deliver in line with my priorities.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the concessionary fares scheme will continue at its current funding levels. (AQW 2078/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the multiple benefits delivered by the concessionary fare scheme and I am determined to preserve the travel discounts presently offered on public transport to the most vulnerable groups in society despite the severe constraints in my Department's budgets, however until the budget for 2020-21 is announced I cannot give an indication of what the funding for concessionary fares will be next year. However I am continuing to engage with my Executive colleagues to ensure sustained levels of recurrent funding going forward to maintain high quality public transport including support for concessionary travel. This is essential to maintain the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the region.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the climate emergency, what measures she intends to put in place in the immediate term to address the lack of smoke emission tests being conducted at MOT centres. (AQW 2079/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Driver and Vehicle Agency currently conducts a diesel emissions test on all heavy goods vehicles, buses and vans over 3,500kgs, and a partial diesel emissions test for cars and light goods vehicles. This includes a visual inspection of the vehicle's emissions and a check of the engine Malfunction Indicator Lamp (MIL), which indicates a defect in the vehicle emission control systems.

The re-introduction of a full emissions test for cars and light goods vehicles under 3,500kgs, will require a significant investment in the vehicle testing estate to create a safe environment for staff and customers, in which an emissions test for diesel cars and light vehicles can be conducted.

I recognise the importance of this issue which I will be giving careful consideration to, including examining what options are available to me to address this matter, alongside urgent steps to return our MOT centres to a position where a full testing service can be provided.

Tackling the climate change emergency is a priority for me and I am committed to doing what I can in my Department within the severe budgetary constraints I have inherited.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether her Department plans to use officials who are or were Traffic Commissioners or deputy Traffic Commissioners from GB to consider casework and preside over public inquiries; (ii) what selection process was used to select these individuals; and (iii) were the positions locally advertised. (AQW 2080/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In May 2019 my Department commenced an exercise to engage suitably experienced and qualified officers to consider backlogged cases on licensing and regulation of goods vehicle operators and make decisions on behalf of the Department. Appointments are short-term in nature (six months) and have been operating since November 2019.

Those being tasked with considering casework and presiding over public inquiries are required to be qualified and experienced in the technical and judicial aspects of the role and, in order to make decisions on behalf of the Department, are required to be publically appointed. I am advised that in the short term it was possible to access people meeting these criteria

through the Office of the Traffic Commissioner, the body responsible for this function across GB. This approach has received support for Industry Associations and has facilitated a number of hearings to date.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) what is the current backlog of (a) public inquiries; (b) preliminary hearings; and (c) hearings in chambers within the Transport Regulation Unit; (ii) what are the oldest cases in this backlog; and (iii) for her assessment of the effect of the backlog on businesses becoming established, expanding or recruiting new employees. **(AQW 2081/17-22)**

Ms Mallon: The count of public inquiries, preliminary hearings and in-Chambers hearings, as at 17th February 2020 are as follows:

- (a) 58 public inquiries; of which 21 are applications, 37 are regulatory;
- (b) 16 preliminary hearings; of which 6 are applications, 10 are regulatory; and
- (c) 68 in-chambers hearings; of which 11 are applications, 57 are regulatory.

Applications can be measured from the date an application was submitted, and the oldest of these is dated April 2015. It is not, however, possible to easily define the specific age of regulatory cases as the hearings are called as a result of a continued record of non-compliance through the life-time of the operator licence.

The licensing and regulatory function of my Department is vital to the goods vehicle industry. It raises standards, improves road safety, and creates a level playing field for operators. The absence of hearings risks the effectiveness of this, as would the approval, without due process, of all applications. I appreciate that the short term effect on affected applicants is frustrating, and I apologise for those continued delays and I have asked officials to work quickly to address the backlog I have inherited to prevent further delay.

The long term benefit, however, is that the industry as a whole is protected by the appropriate refusal of concerning applications, and those operators who are approved are then best placed to expand their business, and employ staff.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether preparations for Brexit, such as expansion of ports, have been funded via the block grant. **(AQW 2082/17-22)**

Ms Mallon: All spend associated with preparing for EU Exit has been funded from an additional ring fenced allocation from Treasury.

In August 2019 The UK Government made £2.1Bn available nationally for EU Exit preparations; Barnett consequentials amounted to £31.4m of additional funding for Northern Ireland.

Of the funding available, DfI was successful in securing £16.5m of capital funding and £3.2m of resource for EU Exit preparatory work.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 1085/17-22, (i) why diesel cars are only subjected to a visual emissions inspection; and (ii) what steps she intends to take to subject these vehicles to a similar diesel emission test to that carried out on vans and lorries weighing over 3,500 kg. **(AQW 2099/17-22)**

Ms Mallon: The diesel emissions test for private cars and light goods vehicles was suspended in 2006 for health and safety reasons, due to the build-up of fumes and increased noise levels being experienced by customers and staff within test halls. Since May 2019, in addition to the visual emissions inspection, these vehicles have also been subject to an assessment of the engine malfunction indicator lamp (MIL). An illuminated MIL identifies defects in the engine emission control system, and the vehicle will fail the test. Since the introduction of the MIL as a testable item over 4,600 vehicles have failed the test on that item alone and have had to have the fault repaired and the vehicle retested.

The re-introduction of a full emissions test for cars and light goods vehicles under 3,500kgs, will require a significant investment in the vehicle testing estate to create a safe environment for staff and customers, in which an emissions test for diesel cars and light vehicles can be conducted.

I recognise the importance of this issue which I will be giving careful consideration to, including examining what options are available to me to address this matter, alongside urgent steps to return our MOT centres to a position where a full testing service can be provided.

Tackling the climate change emergency is a priority for me and I am committed to doing what I can in my Department within the budgetary constraints I have inherited.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many vehicles weighing under 3.5 tonnes have failed the MOT test due to the presence of bullbars, in each of the last five years. **(AQW 2100/17-22)**

Ms Mallon: Cars and light goods vehicles under 3.5 tonnes are subject to annual testing in compliance with the Motor Vehicle Testing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 and the Goods Vehicles (Testing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 respectively.

Both sets of regulations list the statutory test requirements. Bull bars are not included in the list of requirements, therefore a vehicle will not fail its MOT due to the presence of a bull bar.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Infrastructure what consideration she has given to the appointment of an independent traffic commissioner.

(AQW 2111/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 places responsibility for licensing and regulation of goods vehicle operators with my Department. To assist the clearance of a historical backlog my Department has appointed four officers, who also sit as Deputy Traffic Commissioners in GB, to review open cases and preside over inquiries under the vires of NI legislation, on a short-term basis.

This temporary arrangement to use Deputy Traffic Commissioners is supported by the Industry Association. I have asked officials to prepare details on a range of options going forward for my consideration in the coming weeks.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's policy for laying high friction surfacing on high-risk road traffic accident sites.

(AQW 2117/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. I believe that undertaking remedial work as a result of a collision history can help.

High friction surfacing is one of number of measures that the Department can deploy when treating sites where there is collision history, and is used when it is considered that providing higher levels of grip may improve road safety. There is no set policy on when high friction surfacing can be used, as every case and location is considered by engineering officials on its own unique set of circumstances. Examples of locations where it may be appropriate to use high friction surfacing can include: approaches to major junctions; approaches to pedestrian crossings; on stretches with road with steeper gradients where there are other hazards; and, on some bends.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what is the definition followed for planning purposes in respect of energy generation; (ii) how does this compare with the definition followed in GB; and (iii) the difference.

(AQW 2144/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The term "energy generation" is not defined in the Planning Act (NI) 2011 or The Planning (Development Management) Regulations (NI) 2015.

Section 235 of The Planning Act 2008 for England & Wales assigns the meaning for "generating station" as being the same as that in Part 1 of the Electricity Act 1989 that is:

"“generating station”, in relation to a generating station wholly or mainly driven by water, includes all structures and works for holding or channeling water for a purpose directly related to the generation of electricity by that station.”

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will direct planning authorities to put planning applications for battery storage developments through the Hazardous Substances Consent Application process.

(AQW 2145/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Whether or not hazardous substance consent is required is dependent on the provisions of the Planning (Hazardous Substance) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. These Regulations set out the circumstances when developers are required to submit an application for hazardous substance consent to the local council. Applications will be considered on a case by case basis.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure to provide details on how she will ensure that construction of the maximum number of social housing will not be impeded by her Department.

(AQW 2154/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am strongly committed to improving social housing provision by ensuring that the planning system plays its part in supporting the delivery of social housing on the ground. My planning officials continue to work closely with housing officials in the Department for Communities in this regard. They are also working closely with councils and statutory consultees to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning system overall.

In addition, NI Water's role in the planning process is that of a Statutory Consultee. It works closely with councils and developers, including Housing Associations, to find solutions to support planning applications enabling growth and development in an area, whilst protecting the natural environment and existing customers from out of sewer flooding risk.

As Minister I have inherited a range of capital pressures. I recognise the importance of prioritising investment in both water and wastewater infrastructure, not least to build homes and grow our economy. I am also engaging with social housing providers and will continue to engage with all stakeholders, the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Finance to collaboratively work to see more social homes built.

Ms Kimmins asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will address the parking issues at Thomas Street/Pool Lane, Newry.

(AQW 2166/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I can confirm my officials are aware of these issues and that they will be carrying out an on street parking assessment in the coming weeks. The assessment will determine the extent of non-resident all day parking taking place and review the current parking restrictions and arrangements for enforcement.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures are being taken to invest in green and blue infrastructure to reduce the effects of pollution, diminish the heating effect of grey buildings and improve water emissions and flood management.

(AQW 2174/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Green and blue infrastructure has the potential to bring significant benefits to us all in terms of: more physically active lifestyles; improved mental and physical health and wellbeing; reduced social inclusion; environmental improvement and flood risk management; tackling climate change; and strengthening of the local economy and tourism. Green and blue infrastructure therefore has an important role to play in delivering many of the outcomes in the next Programme for Government.

My Department's Living with Water Programme is working to identify a range of opportunities for integrating green and blue infrastructure within Belfast through, for example, the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). Learnings from this programme will provide guidance to be used across all of Northern Ireland. In rural areas, NI Water's dedicated Sustainable Catchment Area Management Planning (SCaMP) team is also working in partnership with a range of organisations to restore blanket bogs and undertake tree planting, both of which can have tremendous benefits to river water quality.

In terms of the greenway network across Northern Ireland, over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how best to deliver on this in order to create a greener environment and to tackle the impact of climate change.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans her Department has to introduce road safety provisions on the A50 at Laurencetown, County Down.

(AQW 2186/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department is aware of the issues and difficulties encountered at this location and has previously undertaken an assessment to consider the provision of safety measures such as a controlled crossing. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the road and constraints of the site, it has not been possible to find a suitable and safe position for a controlled crossing that is also practicable for users, so that the desired safety benefits are realised.

In light of the ongoing concerns, I have asked for an updated assessment to be completed to determine what further measures can be introduced to improve safety at this location and to establish if a more viable solution can be found.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans her Department has to improve road safety at the Point crossroads, Laurencetown, Banbridge.

(AQW 2188/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department is aware of the issues and difficulties encountered at this location and has previously undertaken an assessment to consider the provision of safety measures, such as a controlled crossing. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the road and constraints of the site, it has not been possible to find a suitable and safe position for a controlled crossing, that is also practicable for users, so that the desired safety benefits are realised.

In light of the ongoing concerns, I have asked for an updated assessment to be completed to determine what further measures can be introduced to improve safety at this location and to establish if a more viable solution can be found.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure in regards to planning, whether battery storage of electricity is defined and classed as generation, in line with the rest of the UK, and, if not, what reassurance exists for the difference and what is it classed as.

(AQW 2213/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The terms "electricity generating station" or "battery energy storage facility" are not defined in the Planning Act (NI) 2011 or The Planning (Development Management) Regulations (NI) 2015.

Any application for planning permission will be considered by the relevant planning authority on the basis of the type and scale of development proposed, and against the requirements of extant policy and legislation.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 1038/17-22, why her Department will not provide barriers on the bridges in North Belfast where people have taken, or attempted to take, their own lives.

(AQW 2303/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As set out in my reply to AQW 1038/17-22, my Department is currently working in partnership with stakeholders to consider positive actions that we can take to reduce the number of suicide attempts associated with our transport network, and with bridges in particular. At present, this work is focused on the M2/Westlink corridor. Where appropriate, and where supported by expert opinion, this may include changes to bridge infrastructure.

While I recognise that engineering solutions may provide part of the answer, the issue of additional infrastructure has to be approached carefully with expert advice so as not to reinforce the association of bridges with suicide and further stigmatise the area without necessarily reducing the number of attempts.

I can assure you that I will continue to work closely with Executive colleagues, local communities, experts, stakeholders and staff to ensure that my Department contributes fully to actions that can be taken to reduce the number of suicide attempts associated with our transport network and bridges in particular. I look forward to building on this engagement through the Minister for Health's new Executive Working Group on Mental Well-being, Resilience and Suicide Prevention.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the tender for the replacement of Glenrandel Bridge, Craighbane, that was damaged beyond repair during flooding in August 2017.

(AQW 2379/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Glenrandal Bridge is in an area susceptible to flooding and was one of five bridges damaged beyond repair during the flooding incident of August 2017. It is also a listed structure located within an Area of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation.

Approval of a design for the construction of a replacement bridge has taken longer than normal, owing to the listed status of the bridge and its environment. A design satisfying the requirements of the various agencies involved has now been finalised and the scheme is currently going through the final stages of the tendering process. Subject to a successful conclusion to the procurement process and no delay to the awarding of the contract, it is anticipated that works on the replacement bridge would be completed in September 2020.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to invite local councils to submit expressions of interest as part of the Small Grants Programme for Greenways.

(AQW 2435/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The former 'Small Grants for Greenways' programme operated between 2016 and 2018. Over the coming weeks I want to consider carefully how I can assist in the development of greenways as part of my vision to enable greater sustainable transport options that connect communities, tackle the impact of climate change and improve lives.

I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints and therefore have to look carefully at solutions to help support the delivery of projects to meet my priorities of connecting our communities and enhancing our environment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in regard to her appointment of a special adviser, (i) whether she independently chose her special adviser or an allocation was made by her party; (ii) how it was made known, and to whom, that she was seeking to appoint a special adviser; (iii) whether a pool of candidates was considered; (iv) if so, how many were within the pool; (v) how any pool of candidates was assembled; (vi) what were the essential and desirable criteria set for the job; (vii) by what process was the choice made; (viii) what notes and records were made and kept of the process; (ix) how fair employment obligations were met; (x) on what date(s) was the job offered and accepted; (xi) what was the contractual start date; and (xii) was the range of available salary discussed with the appointee, or was the job offered and accepted without knowledge of the likely salary.

(AQW 2595/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The appointment of my special adviser followed the requirements set out in the Code for the Appointment of Special Advisers which was agreed by the Executive and published by the Department of Finance on 20 January 2020. Salary details were confirmed to me by the Department of Finance on 14 February. My special adviser, Tanya McCamphill, was appointed on 20 January 2020.

Department of Justice

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Justice when was the last competitive tendering process held for a company to deliver the PSNI recruitment process.

(AQW 1639/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): Decisions relating to the recruitment of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the

operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your questions to the PSNI.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) when the contract to recruit PSNI officers was awarded to Deloitte; and (ii) whether it has been assessed as providing value for money.

(AQW 1640/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the recruitment of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your questions to the PSNI.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Litigants in Person Reference Group.

(AQW 1714/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Litigant in Person Reference Group has proved a positive forum for engagement and for working collaboratively to improve the experience of unrepresented parties. While work is at a relatively early stage, the Group is already actively considering how to improve the accessibility to relevant information and courts for Litigants in Person and has facilitated training funded by my Department on supporting distressed litigants. I expect that the Reference Group will continue to build on that progress and take further steps to improve the experience of Litigants in Person.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of cases, at 31 December 2019, that have been in the family justice system for more than five years, within each court level.

(AQW 1715/17-22)

Mrs Long: I would refer the member to the answer to AQW 773/17-22 in response to a similar question from Mr D Beattie MLA (Upper Bann). Information in the form requested is not readily extractable from the Integrated Court Operating System (ICOS) and could only be obtained by the development of a bespoke IT report followed by an extensive manual exercise to quality assure the data.

The information could therefore only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of cases in the family justice system where one party is a Litigant in Person broken down by; (i) gender; (ii) applicant/respondent; and (iii) court level basis.

(AQW 1716/17-22)

Mrs Long: I would refer the member to the answer to AQW 772/17-22. The information in the format requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However the University of Ulster report "Litigants in person in Northern Ireland: barriers to legal participation" contained data on the representation status of participants at the point of completion of cases. This data was extracted from the NICTS Management Information System under the remit of the research project and relates to completed cases during 2012-2017, broken down by business area, reflecting the gender of the issuing and responding parties in both represented and unrepresented cases.

The full report can be accessed at this link:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/309891/179367_NIHRC-Litigants-in-Person_BOOK___5_LOW.pdf

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice to publish a list of the 25 barristers who received the largest total payments from the legal aid fund, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1724/17-22)

Mrs Long: The information requested is not available in the format requested as it constitutes personal data which can only be processed in accordance with the data processing principles set out in the General Data Protection Regulations. The Legal Services Agency last published details of personal earnings for the year 2014/15. This information is available on the Agency's web-site. The Agency will be consulting in 2020/21 on the release of information from 2015-16 onwards under the General Data Protection Regulations.

The table below provides details of the total payments made to those 25 barristers who received the largest total payments from the legal aid fund between 2014/15 and 2017/18. The figures covering 2018/19 are not yet finalised, so cannot be included.

Legal aid payments to barristers - 2014/15 to 2017/18

	Total payments to Top 25 Barristers (£)	Total payments to all Barristers (£)	Payments to Top 25 Barristers as % of all payments
2014/15	9,063,056.01	34,767,010.90	26%

	Total payments to Top 25 Barristers (£)	Total payments to all Barristers (£)	Payments to Top 25 Barristers as % of all payments
2015/16	7,095,637.22	28,076,686.57	25%
2016/17	6,844,335.79	28,021,025.47	24%
2017/18	6,913,318.88	26,186,016.67	26%

The figures set out above include VAT (where appropriate). The payments received in one financial year do not necessarily reflect work done in that financial year. Cases may have lasted more than one year and overall earnings may be increased by one exceptional case lasting a number of years for which payment was received during the financial year in question.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice to publish a list of the 25 solicitors who received the largest total payments from the legal aid fund, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1725/17-22)

Mrs Long: The information requested is not available in the format requested as it constitutes personal data which can only be processed in accordance with the data processing principles set out in the General Data Protection Regulations. The Legal Services Agency last published details of personal earnings for the year 2014/15. This information is available on the Agency's web-site. The Agency will be consulting in 2020/21 on the release of information from 2015-16 onwards under the General Data Protection Regulations.

The table below provides details of the total payments made to those 25 firms of solicitors which received the largest total payments from the legal aid fund between 2014/15 and 2017/18. The figures covering 2018/19 are not yet finalised, so cannot be included.

Legal aid payments to solicitors - 2014/15 to 2017/18

	Total payments to Top 25 Solicitor Firms (£)	Total payments to all Solicitor Firms (£)	Payments to Top 25 Solicitor Firms as % of all payments
2014/15	23,832,717.98	70,457,900.54	34%
2015/16	21,882,952.93	63,447,780.43	34%
2016/17	19,698,612.76	54,958,904.74	36%
2017/18	19,656,222.47	52,759,621.16	37%

The figures set out above include VAT (where appropriate) and disbursements which are payments made by solicitors on behalf of a client, for example fees for expert witnesses.

The payments received in one financial year do not necessarily reflect work done in that financial year. Cases may have lasted more than one year and overall earnings may be increased by one exceptional case lasting a number of years for which payment was received during the financial year in question.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) what actions her Department is taking to eradicate fraud in the legal aid bill; (ii) what measures she will take to ensure greater transparency and scrutiny over legal aid for cases in the High Court; and (iii) whether she will review the levels of legal aid for family civil cases.

(AQW 1737/17-22)

Mrs Long: In respect of (i) my Department is taking a range of measures to address Fraud and Error within the legal aid system covering official, applicant and practitioner fraud and error. The official and applicant aspects of this work are being driven forward in conjunction with the Standards Assurance Unit of the Department of Communities who independently assess the official error rate within the legal aid system. This work is being extended to look at applicant fraud and error. The Legal Services Agency is piloting a methodology to review fraud and error by practitioners from a review of files and information from its new case management system. The Legal Services Agency continues to review complaints about alleged fraud received from the public and will refer cases to Police Service of Northern Ireland if there is evidence of fraudulent activity.

In respect of (ii) remuneration for legal aid cases at the High Court is currently, for the most part, adjudicated by the Taxing Master. My Department is currently scoping a review into how all expenditure currently adjudicated by the Taxing Master in first instance can be properly brought under the purview of the Departmental Accounting Officer. Delivering change in this area will be complex and is likely to involve amending primary legislation.

Finally in respect of (iii) engagement has been undertaken between my Department and relevant stakeholders, including representative bodies of the legal profession, on the issue of review of legal aid for family law cases. This work continues.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of people currently waiting for Access NI certificates; and (ii) the length of time they are waiting.

(AQW 1749/17-22)

Mrs Long: The number of people currently waiting for AccessNI certificate as of 12 February is as follows:

Type of check	Number of outstanding applications	Why outstanding
Basic (Direct application by member of the public)	232	Applications cannot be processed until applicants send identification documents to AccessNI
Basic (Application made through Responsible Body)	23	AccessNI working on basic check applications received on 12 February
Standard	35	AccessNI working on standard check applications received on 11 February
Enhanced	1200	AccessNI working on enhanced check applications received on 8 February.
Enhanced processed but waiting for police response	374	AccessNI cannot issue the certificate until the relevant police force confirm whether they have information to be included in the certificate
Total	1837	

As can be seen from the chart above, AccessNI begins the processing of checks within a few days of receipt. Basic, standard and most enhanced checks are completed and issued on the day of processing. Some enhanced checks that meet specific legislative criteria must be referred to a relevant police force to determine whether that force has information that is relevant and must be disclosed. Applications that follow this route will take longer to complete than others and the length of time to complete the case will vary on an individual basis.

AccessNI would be unable to state for every outstanding case how long individuals are waiting on checks. The table below however sets out how AccessNI has performed against the Ministerial targets for the issue of checks for the period 1 October 2019 to 11 January 2020:

	Target for issue of certificates	Achieved
Basic (Direct application by member of the public)	95% within 14 days of receipt	99.7%
Basic (Application made through Responsible Body)	99% within 7 days of receipt	99.8%
Standard	99% within 7 days of receipt	99.6%
Enhanced	70% within 10 days of receipt	89.7%
	95% within 21 days of receipt	97.5%
	98% within 28 days of receipt	98.3%

Access NI publish anticipated turnaround times for applications on a weekly basis through the NI Direct website: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/costs-and-turnaround-times>

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what is the current prison officer workforce in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 1776/17-22)

Mrs Long: The number of prison officers working in the Northern Ireland Prison Service is 959.

This figure includes Senior Officers, Main Grade Officers, Night Custody Officers and Custody Prison Officers.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers are currently on leave due to long-term sickness.
(AQW 1778/17-22)

Mrs Long: The number of prison officers absent from work due to long-term sickness is 48.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of vacancies for prison officer positions in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 1779/17-22)

Mrs Long: The number of vacancies for prison officer positions in the Northern Ireland Prison Service is 57.

This vacancy figure includes Senior Officers, Main Grade Officers, Night Custody Officers and Custody Prison Officers.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice whether she will give consideration to adopting the model of legal aid for civil, family and matrimonial issues found in England and Wales.

(AQW 1799/17-22)

Mrs Long: I have no current plans to consider adopting the model of legal aid for civil, family and matrimonial issues found in England and Wales by removing these matters from the general scope of legal aid.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to detail the amount of civil legal aid paid per annum, over the past 5 years; broken down into (i) family; (ii) matrimonial; and (iii) other.

(AQW 1800/17-22)

Mrs Long: While the Legal Services Agency does not hold the information in the format requested, it has marshalled the information available under these categories. The amounts paid in each financial year are set out in the table below. In the table the figures for the years 2017/18 and 2018/19 represent Resource expenditure. All previous years reflect Cash expenditure.

Civil legal aid payments, 2014/15 to 2018/19

	Family	Matrimonial	Other Civil
2014/15	£26,289,486	£11,676,623	£19,178,004
2015/16	£25,404,984	£8,428,401	£17,447,763
2016/17	£18,447,438	£6,231,515	£16,577,251
2017/18	£20,057,514	£5,870,505	£15,900,746
2018/19	£19,540,155	£5,878,576	£22,326,351

In the table above the expenditure in Family, Matrimonial and Other Civil cases include the following types of proceedings.

Family

- All Children Order proceedings
- Domestic Violence
- Adoption/Affiliation
- Wardship
- Occupation orders
- Non-Molestation orders

Matrimonial

- Divorce/Maintenance
- Other Matrimonial
- Separation
- Proceedings for arrears of maintenance

Other Civil

- All other types of proceedings.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many attempted prison escapes have there been in the last five years.

(AQW 1852/17-22)

Mrs Long: In the last five years there have been no attempted escapes from Maghaberry Prison, Magilligan Prison or Hydebank Wood Secure College.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what is the current prisoner population.

(AQW 1853/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Northern Ireland prison population, as of 11 February 2020, was 1,596.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the capacity of the Northern Ireland prison system; broken down by prison.

(AQW 1854/17-22)

Mrs Long: The baseline capacity of Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) establishments is shown in the table below:

Establishment	
Maghaberry	982

Establishment	
Magilligan	440
Hydebank Wood Secure College including female accommodation)	313

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently in prison for terrorist offences.
(AQW 1855/17-22)

Mrs Long: As of 11 February 2020, there were 26 individuals in prison for offences relating to terrorism.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department plans to (i) change the regulations which authorise the deductions of Employment and Support Allowance from Police Injury Pensions; and (ii) reimburse all those who have had deductions made from their Police Injury Pensions since April 2017, if she is minded to change the law.
(AQW 1861/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Injury Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 enable Employment Support Allowance deductions to be taken from Injury Benefit payments with effect from 1 April 2017.

The regulations were laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 25 January 2017 at which time they became law.

There are no plans to change the regulations which authorise the deductions of Employment Support Allowance from Injury Benefit payments.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice to outline the lawful basis under which deductions of Employment and Support Allowance from Police Injury Pensions have been made since 1 April 2017.
(AQW 1862/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Injury Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 enable Employment Support Allowance deductions to be taken from Injury Benefit payments with effect from 1 April 2017.

The regulations were laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 25 January 2017 at which time they became law.

There are no plans to change the regulations which authorise the deductions of Employment Support Allowance from Injury Benefit payments.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's plans for Limavady Courthouse.
(AQW 1903/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) is developing an Estates Strategy to identify the optimal configuration of the NICTS Estate to meet future users' needs.

No decision has been taken on the future of any courthouses, including Limavady.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice to outline what measures will be put in place to ensure new provision permitting degree-level entry to the PSNI does not negatively impact engagement with or applications from working class communities.
(AQW 1984/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the recruitment of police officers in the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice what is the average annual cost for each prisoner in Northern Ireland compared to England, Scotland and Wales.
(AQW 2021/17-22)

Mrs Long: The average annual cost for each prisoner place in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales in 2018/19 is set out in the table below

	£
Northern Ireland	54,893
Scotland	40,175
England and Wales (HM Prison & Probation Service)	43,213

It is anticipated that the cost per prisoner place in Northern Ireland in 2019/20 will be £44,112.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many court applications have there been in each of the last 5 years to permit a driver with 12 or more points to continue to hold their driving licence; and (ii) how many of such applications were granted. (AQW 2053/17-22)

Mrs Long: Information in the format requested is not held and cannot be obtained without an extensive manual exercise.

Applications referred to in the question are verbal applications made to the court following conviction. Information requested in (i) on the number of applications made is not recorded.

If an application of this nature is granted an order will be recorded and passed to the Driver and Vehicle Agency. However the same order is used for other non-imposed disqualifications and it is not possible to disaggregate without an extensive manual exercise and assessment.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice how many posts are vacant in the Youth Justice Agency. (AQW 2062/17-22)

Mrs Long: There are currently five vacant posts within the Youth Justice Agency.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the devolution of drug policy, in order to have a bespoke approach to tackling drug abuse. (AQW 2128/17-22)

Mrs Long: The legal framework relating to the misuse of drugs, including the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, is reserved to the UK Government. The Department of Health is responsible for leading on the development of the Executive's cross-sectoral policy on substance misuse, within the confines of the legislation currently in place.

My Department was a key contributor to the Department of Health's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD) Phase 2. An evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of this NSD Phase 2, which includes information on steps that have been taken to address substance abuse, was produced in January 2019 and can be found at: -

https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/NSD%20PHASE%2020Final%20Review%20-%20October%202018_0.pdf

Following a commitment within the 'New Decade, New Approach', the Department of Health is currently leading on the development of a new substance misuse strategy. It is anticipated that the new strategy will be released for public consultation in summer 2020 and will provide an opportunity for the Executive to develop their approach to this issue.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many Preliminary Inquiry committal proceedings have taken place in each of the last 5 years; and (ii) of those, how many resulted in some or all charges being dismissed. (AQW 2146/17-22)

Mrs Long: The information requested is outlined in the tables below.

Committal proceedings in the magistrates' court may take the form of

- a preliminary inquiry (a 'PE'), which is essentially a paper exercise carried out based on written statements and evidence), or
- a preliminary investigation (a 'PI'), where witnesses give oral evidence and are cross-examined), or
- a mixed committal (a 'PE/PI') where some oral evidence may be required during a PE.

For completeness information relating to Preliminary Investigations and mixed committals is also included.

The most recent year for which finalised information is available is 2018.

Preliminary Inquiries (PE) at the Magistrates' Court – 2014 - 2018

Calendar Year	Number of Preliminary Inquiries (PE)	Number of Defendants involved	Number of Defendants with at least one charge dismissed
2014	1,457	1,853	0
2015	1,418	1,766	1
2016	1,328	1,636	0
2017	1,102	1,365	0
2018	1,126	1,391	1

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Based on defendants dealt with during the period.

Type of committal proceedings based on the hearing type assigned to the last sitting on ICOS.

Preliminary Investigations (PI) at the Magistrates' Court – 2014 - 2018

Calendar Year	Number of Preliminary Investigations (PI)	Number of Defendants involved	Number of Defendants with at least one charge dismissed
2014	27	42	1
2015	32	54	0
2016	31	44	2
2017	33	43	0
2018	34	51	1

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Based on defendants dealt with during the period.

Type of committal proceedings based on the hearing type assigned to the last sitting on ICOS.

Mixed Committals (PE/PI) at the Magistrates' Court – 2014 - 2018

Calendar Year	Number of Preliminary Inquiries/Investigations (PE/PI)	Number of Defendants involved	Number of Defendants with at least one charge dismissed
2014	21	37	0
2015	25	39	0
2016	23	37	0
2017	29	65	0
2018	18	31	0

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Based on defendants dealt with during the period.

Type of committal proceedings based on the hearing type assigned to the last sitting on ICOS.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether she will consider the provisions of the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction Of Early Release) Bill; (ii) for (a) details; and (b) minutes of all discussions she has had with the UK Government on this legislation; and (iii) what plans she has to (a) implement the provisions; or (b) engage with the UK Government to implement the provisions.

(AQW 2148/17-22)

Mrs Long: Legislation relating to terrorist offences is a reserved matter, and as such is the responsibility of the UK Government.

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice wrote to me on 27 January 2020 seeking my Department's support to engage with the Ministry of Justice on the development of the Counter Terrorist (Sentencing & Release) Bill. This Bill, developed in response to the London Bridge attack on 29 November, will introduce tougher sentencing for terrorist related offenders, remove the automatic right to early release, and introduce longer licence periods. Mr Buckland has advised it will apply UK wide.

The Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill was introduced as a direct consequence of the events in Strettham, London on 2 February 2020. My officials had a teleconference call with Ministry of Justice and Northern Ireland Office officials on 3 February 2020 to discuss the potential implications of this Bill for Northern Ireland. Although Departmental officials raised reservations about the proposed retrospective application of the provisions, the focus of the discussion was to provide the Ministry of Justice with an understanding of the sentencing framework within Northern Ireland to inform further policy and legislative development.

During an introductory call on 4 February, I informed the Justice Secretary that there should not be a two tier approach to the sentencing and post release management of terrorists within the UK. Engagement between Department of Justice officials and the UK Government Department continued by telephone call that week, culminating with my officials confirming to the Northern Ireland Office on 7 February that, notwithstanding reservations about the retrospective application of the proposals,

the Department has no objections to the provisions extending to Northern Ireland. On 11 February, the UK Government announced the emergency provisions within the Bill would not extend to Northern Ireland at this stage.

The Ministry of Justice has confirmed that further Counter Terrorism legislation will be introduced in coming months which will apply UK wide. The proposed Counter-Terrorism (Sentencing and Release) Bill provides an opportunity to engage on the extension of the provisions related to sentencing and early release contained within the Terrorist Offenders (Restrictions of Early Release) Bill to Northern Ireland.

Officials are currently examining the potential impact, legal and practical implications of draft proposals provided by the Ministry of Justice on 20 February. These proposals set out the scope and potential application of the various provisions within both Bills within Northern Ireland. The intention is that the provisions within the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill will extend to Northern Ireland.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many people in North Belfast wish to see gates at interfaces opened; (ii) how many managed interface gates there are in (a) North Belfast; and (b) West Belfast; (iii) what discussions her Department has had with local communities regarding the removal of interfaces and opening gates.

(AQW 2153/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department does not hold figures indicating the number of people in North Belfast who wish to see gates at interfaces opened.

There are eight interface gates in North Belfast and six gates in West Belfast which open at set times.

The Department's Interface Team engages extensively across Belfast with elected representatives, community groups and residents about the future of individual interface structures, including the opening times of security gates. My response to you dated 7 February 2020, AQW 1265/17-22 highlighted some of the progress being made in North Belfast. In addition the Interface Team is also engaged in dialogue around the opening times for security gates between the Falls and Shankill.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what plans her Department has to increase sentencing for knife crimes in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2232/17-22)

Mrs Long: My Department has no current plans to increase sentencing for knife crimes in Northern Ireland. I do, however, take offences concerning knives very seriously and continue to work in conjunction with criminal justice partners in tackling this important issue.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what plans her Department has to build a prison to replace HMP Magilligan.

(AQW 2233/17-22)

Mrs Long: Work is ongoing on the development of a revised Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Redevelopment of Magilligan Prison. The revised OBC will reflect alternative delivery models which were considered as part of the Estates 2020 discussion document which was launched in December 2018.

The delivery of the Magilligan Redevelopment Project is dependent on the provision of capital funding which will be considered as part of wider Executive budget discussions.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what plans her Department has to review life sentences and associated tariffs.

(AQW 2235/17-22)

Mrs Long: Sentencing in individual cases is entirely a matter for the independent judiciary. My Department is concerned with providing an appropriate legislative framework within which the judiciary can effectively discharge that function.

A public consultation entitled "Sentencing Review Northern Ireland" was launched on 28 October 2019. The Review considered a range of sentencing issues, including the law on tariffs in life sentence murder cases. The consultation closed on 3 February with over 200 responses received. The responses are currently being analysed to inform the Review's final recommendations.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether she will bring forward emergency legislation, as in Great Britain, to end automatic early release of terrorist offenders.

(AQW 2367/17-22)

Mrs Long: Legislation relating to terrorist offences is a reserved matter, and as such is the responsibility of the UK Government.

The Ministry of Justice has however confirmed that further Counter Terrorism legislation will be introduced in coming months which will apply UK wide. The proposed Counter-Terrorism (Sentencing and Release) Bill provides an opportunity to engage on the extension of the provisions related to sentencing and early release contained within the Terrorist Offenders Bill to Northern Ireland. My officials are engaging with the Ministry of Justice to examine how appropriate provisions on the issue of sentencing and early release will be applied in Northern Ireland.

Department for the Economy

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on Project Stratum, including how it will impact on areas of West Tyrone with little or no broadband coverage.

(AQW 863/17-22)

Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy): Project Stratum is at mid-procurement stage and, through this process, my Department will seek to maximise broadband coverage across the intervention area through the utilisation of the total £165m public funding, along with an anticipated industry contribution.

My Department published its response to an Open Market Review EU State aid public consultation on 16 December 2019, which confirmed a target intervention area for Project Stratum. Just over 97,000 premises across Northern Ireland were identified as being eligible to benefit under this project, with 90% of the proposed intervention area being defined as rural.

However, new data received recently from two broadband suppliers has resulted in the number of premises within the intervention area being reduced to just under 79,000. An Addendum to the Open Market Review report was published on 5 February 2020. This is a positive development, as the premises removed can already access speeds of 30 Mbps or greater and do not need to wait on the delivery of Project Stratum.

Within the updated target intervention area, there are just under 9,973 premises in the West Tyrone Constituency eligible for inclusion. While the number and location of premises that will benefit will not be known until the procurement is complete and a contract has been awarded, expected in mid-2020, the revised target intervention area will allow the funding to go further and supports my Department's objective to maximise the number of premises to benefit from the funding available.

It is anticipated, however, that not all premises within the intervention area will benefit. My Department continues to engage with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to explore how such premises will be addressed, as expeditiously as possible, on a national scale and in line with UK Government policy.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy (i) whether the Minister of Finance's comments in relation to no longer pursuing a cut in corporation tax reflects the position of her Department; and (ii) whether she has had any discussions with the Minister of Finance or her Executive colleagues on this matter prior to his comments.

(AQW 910/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Cutting the rate of corporation tax is a useful policy tool that remains open to us for consideration to aid the long term competitiveness of our economy.

However, as the Member may be aware, the commencement clause within the relevant legislation has yet to be triggered by HM Treasury. As a result the ability to alter the rate of corporate tax in Northern Ireland is not yet a devolved power available to the NI Executive to utilise.

While a stated goal in previous mandates, this Executive has not discussed the possibility of reducing the rate of corporation tax, and any move on corporation tax was not part of the "New Decade, New Approach" document.

As we go forward the Executive will look to set out its economic priorities in a new Programme for Government, supported by an Economic Strategy.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy what is the latest estimate of the RHI underspend which will have to be returned to HM Treasury.

(AQW 1258/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: RHI expenditure relating to 2019-20 is estimated to be in the region of £6 -7 million. Available AME budget to meet these costs is £28.9 million. Unused AME that is not drawn down is retained by HM Treasury.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy (i) what is the current level of irregular spend arising from the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme; and (ii) what is the anticipated irregular spend by 2035/36, when the cohort of 788 biomass boilers, admitted without financial authority, leave the scheme.

(AQW 1330/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: 788 biomass boilers were accredited to the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme between 1 April and 29 October 2015 without the requisite spending approvals in place.

- (i) As at 31 March 2019 audited irregular spend arising from tariff payments made in respect of these accreditations amounted to £46.7 million.
- (ii) Based on current tariff rates and CPI inflation of 3%, total irregular spend relating to the 788 accreditations is forecast at approximately £77 million by 2035/36. This forecast is subject to change dependent on tariff reviews and other decisions regarding the future of the scheme.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy for details on the budget for her Department over the past five years; (i) broken down by major spending component; (ii) broken down by gross expenditure per component; and (iii) broken down by percentage share of spend for each component as a share of total Department spend, displayed in tabular form.

(AQW 1434/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The Department for the Economy was established in 2016 and figures are therefore provided from the Financial Year 2016/17. Budgets provided are Non Ring-fenced Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) and Non Ring-fenced Capital DEL.

The Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL baseline Budget broken down by gross expenditure (and income separately) for each major spending component.

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	Gross Resource £m	Income £m	Gross Resource £m	Income £m	Gross Resource £m	Income £m	Gross Resource £m	Income £m
Economic and Business Development and Tourism	182.4	26.1	176.7	27.3	176.7	27.3	183.9	33.2
Employment and Skills	362.9	78.6	358.7	87.2	357.5	87.2	368.7	93.2
Student Support and Higher Education	324.1	6.7	313.5	6.6	313.6	6.6	313.8	6.6
Tourism Ireland Limited	11.7	0.1	12.7	0.1	12.7	0.1	12.7	0.1
InterTradeIreland	2.6	-	3.1	-	3.1	-	3.1	-
Representation and Regulatory Services	22.3	2.6	23.2	3.4	23.1	3.4	23.9	3.4
Total	906.0	114.1	887.9	124.6	886.7	124.6	906.1	136.5
Net RDEL Budget		791.9		763.3		762.1		769.6

The Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL baseline Budget shown as a percentage.

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	Gross Resource %	Income %	Gross Resource %	Income %	Gross Resource %	Income %	Gross Resource %	Income %
Economic and Business Development and Tourism	20	23	20	22	20	22	20	24
Employment and Skills	40	69	40	70	40	70	36	68
Student Support and Higher Education	36	6	35	5	35	5	40	5
Tourism Ireland Limited	1	-	2	-	2	-	2	-
InterTradeIreland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Representation and Regulatory Services	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The Non Ring-fenced Capital DEL broken down by gross expenditure (and income separately) for each major spending component.

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	Gross Capital £m	Income £m	Gross Capital £m	Income £m	Gross Capital £m	Income £m	Gross Capital £m	Income £m
Economic and Business Development and Tourism	40.3	21.6	42.4	22.6	38.3	38.5	36.2	38.0
Employment and Skills	15.9	-	13.0	-	39.4	-	44.6	1.4

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	Gross Capital £m	Income £m	Gross Capital £m	Income £m	Gross Capital £m	Income £m	Gross Capital £m	Income £m
Student Support and Higher Education	25.6	-	15.2	-	12.6	-	11.9	1.3
Tourism Ireland Limited	-	-	-	-	0.4	-	-	-
InterTradelreland	-	-	0.1	-	0.1	-	0.1	-
Representation and Regulatory Services	1.1	-	1.2	-	1.0	-	0.3	-
Total	82.9	21.6	71.9	22.6	91.8	38.5	93.1	40.7
Net CDEL Budget		61.3		49.3		53.3		52.4

The Non Ring-fenced Capital DEL baseline Budget shown as a percentage.

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	Gross Spend %	Income %	Gross Spend %	Income %	Gross Spend %	Income %	Gross Spend %	Income %
Economic and Business Development and Tourism	49	100	59	100	42	100	39	93
Employment and Skills	19	-	18	-	43	-	48	4
Student Support and Higher Education	31	-	21	-	14	-	13	3
Tourism Ireland Limited	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
InterTradelreland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Representation and Regulatory Services	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether (i) there is an acknowledged problem of increased noise emanating from Kells electricity substation in consequence of its intake of power generated by renewables; and (ii) any report has been obtained in respect of same.

(AQW 1757/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) My Department has not been approached regarding noise issues at the Kells Main substation. However, my Department has been informed that NIE Networks (NIEN) are aware of complaints made to Antrim and Newtownabbey Council of an alleged increase in noise. The substation has been operational for a number of years and NIEN currently has no evidence that the alleged increase in noise could be as a consequence of power generated by renewables.
- (ii) NIEN has commissioned an independent noise consultant to undertake investigations and propose any mitigation measures that may be required.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy what is the current and planned intake from renewables at Kells electricity substation.

(AQW 1758/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: NIEN has advised that there are currently no direct connections of renewable generation at Kells Main substation. However as a key strategic node it can be impacted from powerflows across the transmission system driven by conventional generation, renewables and demand across Northern Ireland.

For planned connections under the approved cluster methodology, which has been deployed elsewhere in NI, the Utility Regulator have granted NIEN pre-construction approval to enable connections to a proposed new cluster substation within the current Kells site. This cluster will initially enable connection of up to 90MW of renewables.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy what is the current throughput of Kells electricity substation compared with 5 years ago.

(AQW 1759/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department does not hold the information requested. My Department has been informed by NIEN and The Transmission System Operator (SONI) that the Kells Main 275/110kV substation is currently working within the designed capacity range. However, it is not uncommon for substation powerflows to change over time as load and generation connect and disconnect from the system.

My Department understands that SONI hold archived records for specific powerflows at Kells Main but extracting the data takes considerable time. The member is therefore invited to approach SONI directly for the information required in relation to the past 5 years.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to examine the issue of noise impact for residents local to electricity sub stations, resulting from additional flow through old equipment due to increased intake from renewables.

(AQW 1760/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: It is not within my Department's remit to carry out such an investigation.

There are almost 24,000 renewable generators connected to the distribution network across all voltage levels and via various substation arrangements from pole mounted devices to large transmission substations like Kells Main. Due to such complexity, we understand that neither NIEN nor SONI has carried out any specific research comparing noise output of old equipment with increased intake from renewables.

My Department have been informed that NIEN will, however, be undertaking a number of surveys at larger sites like Kells Main to review noise impact and to introduce mitigation measures where reasonably practicable.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to outline (i) the vintage of the equipment in Kells electric substation; and (ii) how is it coping, including in terms of noise output, with additional throughput from increased intake from renewables.

(AQW 1761/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) The Kells Main substation was constructed in the 1960s and became operational in early 1970.
- (ii) My Department has been informed that the substation is currently performing in line with its design requirements and neither NIEN nor SONI have evidence to suggest that the alleged noise increase at Kells could be a consequence of power generated by renewables.

However related to my answer in AQW 1757/17-22, NIEN has commissioned an independent noise consultant to undertake investigations and propose any mitigation measures that may be required.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy to outline how her Department is ensuring Project Stratum targets areas impacted by poor broadband coverage such as Fermanagh, Omagh and the Sperrins.

(AQW 1806/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Project Stratum is at mid-procurement stage and, through this process, my Department will seek to maximise broadband coverage across the intervention area through the utilisation of the total £165m public funding, along with an anticipated industry contribution.

My Department published its response to an Open Market Review EU State aid public consultation on 16 December 2019, which confirmed a target intervention area for Project Stratum. Just over 97,000 premises across Northern Ireland were identified as being eligible to benefit under this project, with 90% of the proposed intervention area being defined as rural.

However, new data received recently from two broadband suppliers has resulted in the number of premises within the intervention area being reduced to just under 79,000. An Addendum to the Open Market Review report was published on 5 February 2020. This is a positive development, as the premises removed can already access speeds of 30 Mbps or greater and do not need to wait on the delivery of Project Stratum.

Within the revised target intervention area, there are just under 9,973 premises in the West Tyrone Constituency eligible for inclusion. While the number and location of premises that will benefit will not be known until the procurement is complete and a contract has been awarded, expected in mid-2020, the revised target intervention area will allow the funding to go further and supports my Department's objective to maximise the number of premises to benefit from the funding available.

It is anticipated, however, that not all premises within the intervention area will benefit. My Department continues to engage with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to explore how such premises will be addressed, as expeditiously as possible, on a national scale and in line with UK Government policy.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy what steps her Department is taking to address underinvestment and regional inequalities in rural areas west of the Bann.

(AQW 1807/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department, in conjunction with other Executive departments, Invest Northern Ireland, the 11 Councils and the regional colleges, is working collaboratively to deliver a strong, competitive and regionally balanced economy where people are working in better jobs.

Invest NI was actively involved in supporting the 11 Council to develop their Community Plans which include priorities to address regional inequalities, including those in rural areas. The agency, along with the other partners involved, continues to support the councils to help deliver against these priorities and support investment and economic development in all areas of Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, Invest NI's Regional office network, which has locations in Ballymena, Belfast, Craigavon, Enniskillen, Derry~Londonderry, Newry and Omagh, actively engages with stakeholders and the local business community to support activities that will help drive economic development in all regions.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy whether she has any proposals to address the 9% wage differential between rural and urban areas.

(AQW 1809/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department remains committed to improving economic conditions, including increasing wage levels, across the whole of Northern Ireland, for the benefit of everyone.

I recognise that there will inevitably be some variation across Northern Ireland and it is difficult to limit this completely. As well as some variances in wage levels, there will also be corresponding variations in the cost of living.

My Department is leading on the development of an Economic Strategy which will support the Programme for Government and set out the Executive's economic priorities.

The Economic Strategy will set out a suite of policy levers with the collective potential to impact positively on people across the region, including improving the skills profile of the population, providing support for new and existing businesses, improving connectivity and enhancing transport infrastructure.

These policy levers cannot be progressed in isolation. My Department will continue to work closely with other Departments, businesses and other partners including Local Government and the wider public sector to develop a collaborative and partnership approach to make a marked change in our employment rate, wage levels and wider economic conditions for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Ms McLaughlin asked the Minister for the Economy, in light of recent reports that EU state aid rules will continue to apply for Northern Ireland after Brexit, can she advise if this will result in Flybe being unable to continue flights to Northern Ireland post-Brexit; and, if so, what implication this would have for Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 1851/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The EU State aid rules should have no bearing on whether Flybe would be able to continue flights to Northern Ireland post-Brexit.

Any financial assistance provided to Flybe, or to any of the airports that Flybe operates from, including Belfast City Airport, will need to comply with the requisite subsidy rules.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for the Economy to outline when capital investment on the Northern Regional College, Coleraine Campus, will be completed and ready for occupation.

(AQW 1904/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The planned £37m investment by my department is provisionally scheduled to be completed by the end of July 2022 to enable occupation at the beginning of the academic year in September 2022. While this is considered achievable, it is nonetheless a challenging timescale. The construction phase of the project is currently out to tender and following appointment of a contractor, the college will be in a better position to determine the completion date.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for the Economy whether she intends to bring forward remote working legislation, setting out legal rights for employees to request placement at a different location or to work from home.

(AQW 1919/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The right to request flexible working was extended to all employees with qualifying service in April 2015. An application may include a request to work from home or some other location.

Mr Blair asked the Minister for the Economy to detail what preparation her Department is taking to enact the terms of the Revised Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland included in the Withdrawal Agreement.

(AQW 1988/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The responsibility for enacting the terms of the Protocol lies primarily with the United Kingdom Government (UKG). There are likely to be some implications for devolved matters falling into the remit of my Department and its Arm's Length Bodies.

While we are undertaking contingency planning now to identify those potential impacts, the extent of our preparations will depend on the practical detail of the implementation of the Protocol which has not yet been agreed by UK Government and the EU.

My immediate priority is to prevent any adverse impacts on NI business and consumers and to hold UKG to its commitments to protect NI's place in the UK internal market. I will also seek to support business to adjust to the new economic reality and to take advantage of the opportunities ahead.

Mr Blair asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the timetable for the conclusion of an updated skills strategy.
(AQW 1990/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: We intend to launch a new Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland in December 2020, subject to Executive agreement. It will set the strategic framework for skills development for the next 10 years, aligning to the outcomes envisaged in the Programme for Government. Full public consultation will commence in June.

In response to feedback from stakeholders in business, and in the context of a rapidly changing labour market, the Strategy will be supported by short, medium and long term implementation plans. This approach will ensure a more responsive, agile approach to skills development, matching the changing needs of our economy and society.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the amount of Invest NI financial support provided to job creation and employment support projects in each council area over the last 3 years.
(AQW 1994/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The table below shows the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI to job creation projects in the past 3 years broken down by council area.

DCA	Assistance Offered £m
Antrim and Newtownabbey	3.61
Ards and North Down	3.05
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	7.58
Belfast	39.79
Causeway Coast and Glens	4.47
Derry City and Strabane	12.50
Fermanagh and Omagh	3.54
Lisburn and Castlereagh	6.67
Mid and East Antrim	2.52
Mid Ulster	12.40
Newry, Mourne and Down	9.74

Support for job creation accounted for just over a quarter of assistance offered by Invest NI during the period. In addition, Invest NI offered support to projects to develop R&D, skills, innovation & technology and overseas trade.

For the Member's information, Invest NI annually publishes offer activity data on OpenDataNI: <https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/dataset/open-data-up-to-17-18-csv-file-uploaded-csv-13-to-2016-17>. In the available datasets, Invest NI lists details of all financial support it has offered companies that can then be freely interrogated across a number of parameters, including area and type of support.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for the Economy how her Department will ensure that climate action measures are factored into its Industrial Strategy.
(AQO 165/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department is committed to leading on the development of an Economic Strategy that sets out the Executive's economic priorities and supports a new Programme for Government. A new Energy Strategy will be an intrinsic element of this new overarching Economic Strategy.

The move towards net zero carbon over the next 30 years provides a significant opportunity for local businesses to participate in the development and delivery of low carbon and zero carbon solutions.

The Economic Strategy will look to support and promote these opportunities, in addition to encouraging individual businesses and business clusters to move towards zero carbon.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for the Economy how she plans to improve the participation rates of care experienced children accessing and completing third level education.

(AQO 166/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department has identified care experienced children as an under-represented group in Higher Education. Any higher education provider wishing to charge more than the basic fee for any course must spend a minimum of 10% of the additional fee income on widening participation activities and programmes for under-represented groups. This includes care experienced students. Each provider must produce an annual Widening Access and Participation Plan for my Department's approval. My Department works closely with all higher education providers, including the Further Education Colleges, to ensure these plans demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds into and through higher education. Providers are specifically required to target financial support to under-represented groups. Providers have flexibility to determine what measures to introduce and these support measures may take the form of bursaries and other direct financial support such as fee waivers. The measures also include post-entry support activities such as mentoring and additional tutoring to ensure each student's progress and success.

Students attending the Further Education Colleges who are experiencing financial hardship may apply for a Further Education Grant or apply to the Hardship Fund. Depending upon age and income criteria, an independent student who is in care, or in placed accommodation after being in care, may be eligible to access these support funds.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for the Economy for her assessment of Southern Regional College facilities.

(AQO 167/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Southern Regional College provides further education from 5 main centres – Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown, along with limited provision in Killeel.

The College is currently undergoing a major modernisation programme with investment of approximately £100 million from my Department. This includes £45 million of expenditure incurred from 2015/16 through to 2019/20, with the remaining spend profiled until 2023. This investment will address deficiencies in the ageing estate and see the delivery of three new state-of-the-art campus buildings in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon.

The new Armagh and Banbridge campuses are in the final stages of construction and will be fully operational for the start of the 2020/21 academic year (in September).

The planned development at South Lakes in Craigavon is intended to rationalise the estate by replacing facilities at Lurgan and Portadown with a single modern facility in an accessible and neutral site.

This project is currently delayed due to a judicial review taken against Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, in relation to the granting of planning approval.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department is in discussions with Derry City and Strabane District Council to provide the required capital match funding in 2020/21 for the Derry City and Strabane Deal and the Inclusive Future Fund.

(AQO 169/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I would like to start by congratulating Derry City and Strabane District Council on securing UK Government agreement, in principle, to provide £50 million City Deal funding.

I understand that the Finance Minister will be presenting a paper shortly to the Executive to secure its agreement, in principle, to match fund all the City and Growth Deals in Northern Ireland and the Inclusive Future Fund.

My Department's involvement with the Council and its partners has been on the proposed projects which will form part of the City Deal and the Inclusive Future Fund.

My officials are engaging with the Council on the development of these projects as the Council develops its City Deal proposal.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for the Economy how many properties in Fermanagh and South Tyrone do not have access to high speed or superfast broadband.

(AQO 170/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: There is no official definition of high speed broadband. In its latest Connected Nations Report, Ofcom indicates that 7,686 premises in Fermanagh and South Tyrone cannot access speeds of 10 Megabits per second or greater. Ofcom defines superfast broadband as 30 Megabits per second or greater. From analysis of data received through the Project Stratum Open Market Review and subsequent public consultation, my Department has identified 12,841 premises within the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency that do not have access to superfast speeds.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for the Economy how the roll-out of Project Stratum prioritises improvements to internet connectivity in areas with the least access to superfast broadband.

(AQO 171/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department will seek to maximise the number of premises to benefit from Project Stratum.

Over 95 per cent of the project's target intervention area is rural, made up of villages with a population of less than 1,000 and other premises in open countryside.

Analysis undertaken by my Department and advice from independent advisors indicates that it is not possible to prioritise specific geographical areas, without potentially reducing the overall number of premises to benefit, increasing costs and slowing delivery.

Mr Catney asked the Minister for the Economy how she plans to address the low level of entrepreneurship.

(AQO 172/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Entrepreneurship is one of the key drivers of growth and transformation in our economy.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor shows that, as at 2018, our performance in total entrepreneurship activity is comparable to Wales and Scotland, but behind England. It is also important to note that the UK performance, as a whole, compares favourably with both France and Germany.

Actions currently being taken to improve this performance include:

- the Northern Ireland Business Start-up Programme which, following the transfer of functions under the Review of Public Administration in 2015, is now delivered by local councils across Northern Ireland. The programme plays a key first step in supporting entrepreneurship and it supported the creation of 1,820 jobs in 2018-19;
- the FE sector has a key role to play, with the Northern Regional College now established as the entrepreneurship curriculum hub. This will ensure appropriate training and reskilling for present and future generations of entrepreneurs;
- Invest NI has developed a comprehensive Entrepreneurship Action Plan and has established a new Entrepreneurship Forum. This comprises a range of members from across central and local government, the private sector, academia and others. Its objectives are to improve communication and encourage collaboration between stakeholders and make recommendations for further work.
- Invest NI also provides a range of support for new export focussed businesses with high growth potential to start up and accelerate growth.

Mr Butler asked the Minister for the Economy how her Department is ensuring that there are no barriers to people with Special Educational Needs in accessing higher education.

(AQO 173/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 a school is required to identify the needs of children and young people. After children and young people leave compulsory education they must self-declare their needs or disabilities to higher education institutions.

My Department has identified disability as an under-represented group in Higher Education. Higher education institutions wishing to charge more than the basic tuition fee for any course must set targets for the enrolment of disabled students. They must spend a minimum of 10% of the additional fee income per annum on widening participation activities and programmes, including financial support,

targeted at under-represented groups, including disabled. The Department also pays the higher education institutions a widening participation premium for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a widening access premium for students with disabilities.

Higher education institutions have flexibility to determine what measures to introduce but a number of providers have bursaries available for disabled students and have a number of non-financial support measures in place.

Students who require assistance with their educational needs or disabilities can also use the Disabled Students' Allowance to pay for specialist equipment and non-medical helpers to offer support such as note taking, proofreading and specialist one to one study skills support. Students who qualify for the allowance can also claim for travel costs based on the difference between public transport costs from their residence to place of study and return, and the costs of the alternative arrangements.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline her plans for the development and expansion of the University of Ulster's Magee Campus.

(AQO 168/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In relation to the proposed Graduate Entry Medical School at the Magee Campus of Ulster University, the Department of Health owns the policy in relation to medical education provision. Ulster University has submitted a business case to the Department of Health and Westminster has committed a ring-fenced allocation of £60 million of Capital Grant and Resource DEL towards that proposal. My officials are in ongoing contact with the Department for Health on this project.

As regards broader expansion at Magee, following a request by the DfE Permanent Secretary for an update on the university's proposals for Magee the University confirmed in correspondence to my Department in September 2019, that it

remained committed to securing expansion of its Magee campus, and at the same time confirmed that the business case required updating prior to any consideration by the Department or Executive.

I recognise that considerable work needs to be done prior to any proposal being submitted for Executive consideration, however I am also committed to working with the University around the consideration of any expansion proposals that it develops.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for the Economy how, in the absence of a cut in corporation tax, she plans to transform the Northern Ireland economy and close the productivity gap with the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQO 174/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department is committed to improving economic conditions and strengthening the Northern Ireland economy for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland.

My Department will lead on the development of a new Economic Strategy. The Strategy will support the Programme for Government and set out the Executive's economic priorities.

Raising productivity will be a key focus of the Economic Strategy.

The emphasis will be on policies and programmes to support the drivers of productivity. These will include more effective innovation and research, high quality jobs with the skills pipeline to match and a supportive business environment and infrastructure to help businesses to thrive and grow.

We must also make strategic choices to support productivity gains in higher value adding sectors, where Northern Ireland has strength, capacity and export potential. At the same time we will ensure that we have effective programmes to support all businesses to reach their full potential.

Mr Storey asked the Minister for the Economy, following the recent announcement by the Prime Minister on planned investment in battery powered and hydrogen-fuelled buses, to outline how she will assist Wrightbus to realise the resultant economic opportunities.

(AQO 175/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department is committed to improving economic conditions and strengthening the Northern Ireland economy for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland.

My Department will lead on the development of a new Economic Strategy. The Strategy will support the Programme for Government and set out the Executive's economic priorities.

Raising productivity will be a key focus of the Economic Strategy.

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with the skills pipeline to match and a supportive business environment and infrastructure to help businesses to thrive and grow.

We must also make strategic choices to support productivity gains in higher value adding sectors, where Northern Ireland has strength, capacity and export potential. At the same time we will ensure that we have effective programmes to support all businesses to reach their full potential.

Mr Harvey asked the Minister for the Economy how Invest NI is performing against its target of attracting foreign direct investment.

(AQO 176/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In support of the draft Programme for Government, Invest NI's Business Strategy has a target of supporting and encouraging companies to create 30,000 to 40,000 additional jobs.

As a measure of progress towards this outcome, Invest NI has internal activity targets. This includes a target for jobs assisted from externally-owned companies.

Over the four years of its business strategy Invest NI aims to assist companies to deliver 7,200 to 10,600 jobs. As at the 31 March 2019, the midway point of the business strategy period and the latest period for which figures are fully available, Invest NI has helped secure 4,971 jobs – 69 per cent of the target.

Invest NI continues to work across its network of overseas offices to attract further employment related projects from externally-owned companies to Northern Ireland and the agency is confident that it will achieve its target in full.

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for the Economy whether she plans to set targets for Invest NI to ensure future jobs are located in Foyle.

(AQO 177/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: All targets within the extant Invest NI Business Strategy 2017-2021 are on a regional i.e. Northern Ireland wide basis.

Invest NI supports Councils to drive economic development in their area. Each Council has its own Community Plan, with targets for investment and growth. Derry City and Strabane District Council has set a target of 15,100 jobs by 2032. Invest NI's support for businesses in the region will contribute towards this.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 6 March 2020

Written Answers

The Executive Office

Mr Givan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the religious breakdown of employees in the Equality Commission.

(AQW 1931/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The religious breakdown of employees in the Equality Commission is reported each year in the Commission's Annual Report. The most recent version can be found on their website: <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Corporate/Annual%20Reports/AnnualReport2018-19.pdf?ext=.pdf>

Mr Givan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the staffing cost associated with the Equality Commission's involvement in the Lee v Ashers Baking Company Ltd case at (i) the High Court; (ii) the Court of Appeal; and (iii) the Supreme Court stages.

(AQW 2482/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is a Non Departmental Public Body and as such this is a matter for the Commission to answer. We have therefore asked the Chief Executive to respond to you directly on this matter.

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to ensure that the redress panels for victims and survivors are adequately funded in the future.

(AQO 120/17-22)

Mrs Foster and Mrs O'Neill: The Executive Office (TEO) has a statutory obligation to establish and fund a Redress Board under the HIA (Northern Ireland) Act 2019.

We are committed to ensuring that victims and survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse receive long awaited redress payments at the earliest possible opportunity, with related implementation work ongoing, at pace, across a number of Departments.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he has any plans to look at legislation relating to commercial dog day care centres.

(AQW 1868/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Commercial dog day care, overnight home-to-home boarding and kennels are currently legislated for under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and the Animal Boarding Establishments Regulations (NI) 1974.

Comprehensive Departmental guidance on animal boarding establishments is available to all business operators.

I am aware of the modern day demands for a wider range of facilities around animal boarding establishments, including expectations around socialisation of dogs. I am committed to instigating reform to modernise the regulation of animal boarding establishments while maintaining high welfare standards and continuing to protect the well-being of pets.

I have therefore asked my Chief Veterinary Officer to work with industry and set up a working group to identify the best way forward and progress this matter in a timely manner.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) what percentage of (a) public; and (b) private land are currently forested areas; and (ii) how does this compare with the averages of (a) the EU-15 and; (b) the EU-28.

(AQW 1899/17-22)

Mr Poots: National Statistics report that 8% of land cover in Northern Ireland is woodland, which equates to 113,000 hectares. My Department manages 62,000 hectares (55%) of the total forested land cover and 51,000 hectares (45%) are managed primarily in private ownership.

In comparison, Eurostat reports that 43% of land cover in the EU-28 is woodland, 40% of which is publically owned and 60% is privately owned. Eurostat does not report statistics for the EU-15.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to improve the reporting of water quality by his Department, following the deficiencies noted in the recent Article 10 and Article 17 reports.

(AQW 2096/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department has responsibility for monitoring water quality in surface waters and groundwater across Northern Ireland for the purpose of reporting under a number of EU Directives.

In accordance with Article 10 of the EC Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC), member states report every four years to the Commission on the status of water quality and the impact of action programmes on water quality and agricultural practices. The most recent report was completed in 2016 and covered the period 2012 to 2015. This report referenced a reduction from monthly to quarterly monitoring frequencies for nutrient levels at some surface water sites, during 2015, due to resource pressures. Monthly monitoring of surface waters was however reinstated during 2016.

My Department is also required to report on the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (under Article 17) every six years. The fourth UK report was submitted to the EU in August 2019, and covers the implementation period 2013–2018. Since then my Department has moved from quarterly sampling to monthly sampling and this data is now available and will be used in future assessments.

I would wish to make it clear that my Department has achieved its statutory monitoring obligations and reporting requirements under these EU Directives both on time and to the agreed standards. The short term reduction in the monitoring frequency of surface waters in 2015 did not result in any deficiencies in reporting while the enhanced monthly frequencies for reporting under both Directives will serve to improve future confidence in our results.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many licenses have been issued for the importation and release of red-legged partridges, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2102/17-22)

Mr Poots: During the last five years DAERA has issued seven licenses in respect of trade for the importation of partridges (see table below). The licence does not record species details.

Year	Number of Licences
2015	1
2016	0
2017	6
2018	0
2019	0
2020	0

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether his Department currently tests farmed deer for TB infections; and (ii) if so, to provide numbers of restricted herds, broken down by county.

(AQW 2115/17-22)

Mr Poots: Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) can infect and cause disease in a number of mammals, including deer. Under current legislation, the Department only has powers to test non-bovine animals (including farmed deer) where a cattle herd is maintained on the same holding.

Therefore, farmed deer are not routinely tested for bTB in Northern Ireland. However, as bTB is a notifiable disease, any animal, including deer, which is affected or suspected of being affected of the disease must be notified to the Department.

As the Department does not carry out routine testing for bTB in farmed deer, there are no restricted deer herds.

At present, deer are not considered to play a significant role in the overall epidemiology of bTB in cattle in Northern Ireland. A research project to assess the role of deer in the spread of bTB started in June 2019 and is expected to complete at the end of July 2022. The evidence gathered from this project will provide a better understanding of interactions between cattle

bTB breakdowns and deer (farmed and wild). This will be used to inform policy development in the area of non-bovine bTB controls.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether his Department investigates wild deer for TB infections; and (ii) what checks are in place to prevent the meat from getting into the food chain.

(AQW 2116/17-22)

Mr Poots: Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) can infect and cause disease in many other mammals, including deer. Under our current legislation, the Department only has powers to test non-bovine animals where a cattle herd is maintained on the same holding. Therefore, wild deer are not routinely investigated for bTB in Northern Ireland. However, as bTB is a notifiable disease, any animal, including deer, which is affected or suspected of being affected of the disease must be notified to the Department.

A research project to assess the role of deer in the spread of bTB started in June 2019 and is expected to complete at the end of July 2022. The evidence gathered from this project will provide a better understanding of interactions between cattle bTB breakdowns and deer. This will be used to inform policy development in the area of non-bovine bTB controls.

Huntsmen are required to report any suspicious lesions they find on shot deer to the Department and there are currently two approved wild game handling establishments in Northern Ireland which receive shot wild deer. Department Officials carry out post mortem checks in these facilities to ensure the safety of deer meat entering the food chain. All meat from animals in which post-mortem inspection has revealed localised tuberculous lesions in a number of organs or a number of areas of the carcass is declared unfit for human consumption, which is also the requirement for meat from bovines. These inspections are carried out by Department officials on behalf of the Food Standards Agency.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how his Department is adopting a trauma-informed approach when developing policy and legislation.

(AQW 2124/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department is working hard to develop and deliver policies and legislation within the context of the draft Programme for Government (2016-2021), using Outcomes Based Approaches to ensure policy making is informed by a sound evidence base and extensive stakeholder engagement, supplemented by rigorous impact assessment. While not explicit, current processes do encompass elements of a trauma informed approach, such as cognisance of impact on marginalised members of the community, collaborative working and intersectionality.

Whilst I have no plans to formally introduce a trauma-informed approach when developing policy and legislation within my Department, I have asked officials to engage with colleagues from other Departments via the NICS Policy Community to obtain information on where this approach is being used within NICS, and the extent to which it would be of relevance to my Department.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of the importance of public confidence in the Islandmagee Gas Storage Project Consultation process; and for his assessment of the impact that an extension of the consultation will have on public confidence.

(AQW 2176/17-22)

Mr Poots: I believe that it is very important that the public has full confidence in the consultation for the proposed gas storage project at Island Magee.

The applicant has hosted a number of public events to promote direct engagement with members of the public. These have been attended by DAERA staff. The extension has facilitated two further events on 20th February and 18th March and gives the general public an additional opportunity to comment on the proposal. The applicant has also established an Islandmagee Energy Fund of £1 million which is to be allocated and utilised within the local community over the life-span of the proposed project.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline if Statutory Rules (i) SR 2019/61 The Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019; and (ii) SR 2019/65 The Sea Fishing (Licenses and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 are not approved, will it allow unabated fishing by other countries in Northern Ireland-controlled waters.

(AQW 2189/17-22)

Mr Poots: The revocation of Statutory Rules 2019/61 and 2019/65 will not allow unabated fishing in the Northern Ireland zone by vessels from other countries. During 2020 the rules of EU Common Fisheries Policy will continue to apply and EU and coastal state vessels will have to comply with EU and local fishing rules when fishing in United Kingdom (UK) waters. Access to UK waters (including the Northern Ireland zone) after the end of the implementation period will be subject to the fisheries negotiations between the U.K. Government, the European Union and coastal states. In that regard the Fisheries Bill which was introduced in the House of Lords on 29 January 2020 will provide the necessary powers for controlling access to our waters through the licensing of non –UK fishing vessels in 2021.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, if Statutory Rules (i) SR 2019/61 The Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019; and (ii) SR 2019/65 The Sea Fishing (Licenses and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 are not approved, to outline what plans he has to stop unrestricted fishing in Northern Ireland-controlled waters.

(AQW 2190/17-22)

Mr Poots: Future access to United Kingdom (UK) waters (including the Northern Ireland zone) after the end of the implementation period will be subject to the fisheries negotiations between the U.K. Government, the European Union and other coastal states. The Fisheries Bill which was introduced in the House of Lords on 29 January 2020 provides the necessary powers for granting and controlling access to our waters and for the regulation of foreign fishing vessels therein. The Bill will make it illegal for any fishing vessel (both UK and non UK) to fish for sea fish in UK waters without a sea fishing licence issued by the UK Fisheries Administrations. Non-UK vessels will only be given a licence by the UK authorities if, the UK has reached an agreement with the EU or a coastal state concerning access and/or quota. The conditions in the licence will ensure that vessels comply with the terms of any international agreements.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he has made a decision regarding the future of the Agricultural Wages Board.

(AQW 2195/17-22)

Mr Poots: The Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) is included in the commitment made in the New Decade, New Approach agreement to review the efficiency and effectiveness of Arm's Length Bodies. The timescale for this is not yet known. My Ministerial predecessor had initiated a process to close the AWB in late 2016. I will consider this again in the context of that decision and the wider review commitment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 797/17-22, (i) did the certificates required of the applicants' chartered engineers require confirmation that the structure was tested for leaks and was certified to be leak proof in accordance with BS-8007; and (ii) if not, why not.

(AQW 2211/17-22)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The Chartered Engineers certificates did not require specific confirmation in relation to testing for leaks and being leak proof, nor any other specific sections of the relevant British Standards. The certificate required overall confirmation that the structure was designed and constructed to all relevant British Standards, including BS 5502 and BS 8007.
- (ii) In requesting the Chartered Engineers to confirm that the structures were designed and constructed to all the relevant British Standards, including BS 5502 and BS 8007, it was accepted that, due to the professional competence of all such registered Chartered Engineers, the necessary calculations and checks were adhered to.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 1376/17-22, whether he could expand upon his answer in order to provide clarification of its meaning.

(AQW 2256/17-22)

Mr Poots: Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) are afforded statutory protection and potentially damaging activities are subject to assessment before being permitted. Such assessments occur in relation to planning control the granting of consents for certain operations, and the granting of environmental permits, such as for intensive agriculture and waste operations.

Officials are working to improve access to data on ASSI features and threats, and on guidance to inform decisions related to development that could impact on sites, thus enhancing the protection of ASSIs. A particular issue for ASSIs is the impact of atmospheric nitrogen and ammonia emissions on sensitive species. The ammonia and nitrogen deposition protocol is currently under review by the Department.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many convictions for environmental crime there has been, broken down by (i) type of conviction; (ii) financial penalties given; and (iii) custodial sentences given, for each year since 2008.

(AQW 2265/17-22)

Mr Poots: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Year	No. of convictions	Type of convictions	Financial penalties given	Custodial sentences
2008	43	43 waste	£119,500	
2009	35	35 waste	£77,250	

Year	No. of convictions	Type of convictions	Financial penalties given	Custodial sentences
2010	51	16 waste 34 water 1 other	£102,250	
2011	85	30 waste 51 water 4 other	£128,418	
2012	82	25 waste 52 water 5 other	£165,325	
2013	79	40 waste 37 water 2 other	£99,934	
2014	61	32 waste 28 water	£121,195	
2015	82	34 waste 38 water 1 other	£111,575	
2016	36	9 waste 27 water	£75,400	1
2017	30	10 waste 20 water	£89,400	
2018	22	4 waste 18 water	£165,700	
2019	18	5 waste 13 water	£92,550	

'other' types of convictions refer to those taken by NIEA's Industrial Pollution and Radiochemical Inspectorate

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to the Mills Review, whether there has been an introduction of stronger criminal custodial sentences for those involved in illegal dumping.

(AQW 2267/17-22)

Mr Poots: There have been no legislative changes to statutory maximum custodial sentences for environment offences involving serious illegal dumping since the Mills Review. The maximum sentence remains at 5 years' imprisonment on indictment.

The severity of sentencing handed down by the Courts in respect of the above will be influenced by a range of factors, such as the volume and type of waste disposed of, the environmental impact, the offender's attitude and whether their actions are considered deliberate, reckless or negligent. Any view on the strength of sentencing can therefore be open to some degree of subjectivity.

Since the Mills Review, there has been one custodial sentence handed down by the courts which, following consideration by the Appeal Court, was determined as appropriate.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many applicants have applied for the Environmental Farming Scheme.

(AQW 2269/17-22)

Mr Poots: To date there have been 5,125 applications to the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) Wider level and 2,402 applications to the EFS Higher level. This is broken down in the table below.

Year	Individual Applications for EFS	
	Higher	Wider
2017 Tranche 1	932	1435
2018 Tranche 2	538	1641
2019 Tranche 3	932	2049

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many of the successful Environmental Farming Scheme applicants have been awarded funding.

(AQW 2270/17-22)

Mr Poots: To date, 2,916 Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) Wider level applicants have been awarded funding - 1,302 in Tranche 1 and 1,614 in Tranche 2.

Some 593 applicants to the EFS Higher level have been awarded funding - 241 in Tranche 1 and 352 in Tranche 2.

Agreements for Tranche 3 EFS Higher and Wider have not yet been offered.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he intends to reinstate Areas of Natural Constraint monies to farmers in less favoured areas.

(AQW 2271/17-22)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to reinstate the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme. Given that we have now left the EU I have an opportunity to review funding for the entire sector. I am looking forward to developing a new policy framework for agricultural support that is shaped to the specific needs of the local industry.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) what reforms have been made since (a) the discovery of the illegal dump site at Mobuoy; and (b) the Mills Review in 2013, to improve the tracking and monitoring of illegal waste; and (ii) for his assessment of the success of the changes.

(AQW 2304/17-22)

Mr Poots: In depth waste data audits at waste management facilities were introduced to understand waste flows with a view towards delivering the enhanced traceability of waste. A waste data audit compares waste data held by my Department with that held by the waste management facility. This is followed by upstream and downstream audits to validate this data and identify waste flows. Since this approach started there has been a noticeable improvement in sites Duty of Care obligations.

The four UK environment agencies and governments are working on a project to scope out a UK waste tracking service, looking into how best we can track the movement of waste in future. The project, which was initiated by the four environment agencies in 2015 and progressed to a cross Government discovery phase led by DEFRA in 2018, was successful in bidding for Govtech Challenge funding. The project is now in the second phase of this work with the aim of building the UK's first comprehensive digital waste tracking system.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to the Mills Review recommendations, (i) whether his Department established a task and finish group to look at the additional regulatory and enforcement powers needed by his Department; and (ii) if so, to outline the findings of this group.

(AQW 2305/17-22)

Mr Poots: A task and finish group was established to carry out a review of the effectiveness of existing waste regulatory powers and to identify options for any further powers considered necessary.

The key findings of the group included –

- The need to strengthen the requirements around prescribed offences, technical competence and financial provision elements of the fit and proper person test in relation to an application for a waste management licence;
- Limitations in terms of the duty of care waste transfer note requirements and a need for NIEA to review its procedures in relation to the monitoring and enforcement of duty of care obligations;
- A need to use powers under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 more effectively including fixed penalty notices for minor infringements;
- A need to review policies and procedures with respect to the revocation and suspension of licences;
- A need for the Department to fully assess the financial, environmental and health risks associated with non-commencement of Part III of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997;
- A lack of resources to undertake effective regulation of waste carrier registration and a need to review the waste carrier registration process;
- A need for the Department to publish a basic statement on the use of the Environmental Liability (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009; and
- A need to conclude a review of waste management licensing exemptions and update the relevant legislation concerning these.

From a legislative perspective, a number of positive interventions have been taken forward since 2014 which address some of the key findings raised by the group. This includes amendments which have strengthened the legislative requirements around waste licensing exemptions, duty of care, and the assessment of a fit and proper person.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether recommendations from the Mills Review to reform the (a) Fit and Proper Person Test; and (b) Duty of Care principles have been implemented; and (ii) if so, to detail the reforms made.

(AQW 2307/17-22)

Mr Poots: Recommendations from the Mills Review to reform the Fit and Proper Person (FPP) Test and Duty of Care principles have been implemented as follows:

FPP Test - The Waste Management Licensing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, operational since July 2015, updated the technical competence requirements for waste operators and removed the exclusion of scrap metal dealers and car dismantlers from the requirements to be certified. The Waste Management Licensing (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, operational since December 2015, updated the list of prescribed offences that must be taken into account by the Department when determining if an individual is a fit and proper person to hold a waste management licence. The changes brought about by these Regulations allow the Department to look at a broader spectrum of offences including financial offences and other criminal activities.

Duty of Care - The Controlled Waste and Duty of Care Regulations (NI) 2013, operational since November 2013, introduced requirements for all waste carriers and operators to carry documentation containing specified information, known as Waste Transfer Notes, along with the waste they relate to, and to produce such a note if stopped by an authorised officer or a constable.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what financial provision he plans to provide in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to address the climate and biodiversity crisis.

(AQW 2310/17-22)

Mr Poots: My department has sought additional funding of £2.2m / £2.7m Resource and £2.1m / £7.8m Capital in 2020-21 and 2021-22 to take forward the climate change references for DAERA in the "New Decade New Approach" document.

This is in addition to the £3m / £9m Strategic Environment Programmes Resource bids over the next two years which have been submitted to DoF as part of the ongoing Budget exercise. If this funding is allocated it would help to specifically realise improvements in biodiversity, air and water quality and some marine programmes which in turn should also contribute to combatting climate change.

The final allocations to these areas will be confirmed after the Executive agrees the budgets for DAERA for each of these years.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether the new air quality strategy will include (i) a framework to create Clean Air Zones as in England and Wales; or (ii) Ultra Low Emissions Zones as in Scotland.

(AQW 2316/17-22)

Mr Poots: My department has been working on developing a draft Clean Air Strategy. This work involves close collaboration with other departments and officials continue to work together to finalise the draft discussion document on the Clean Air Strategy.

Once the draft discussion document is complete, I will consider the options for issuing the draft Clean Air Strategy discussion document for public consultation later in the year to seek views on a wide range of matters.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the action plan on ammonia.

(AQW 2317/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department is developing a series of practical on-farm measures to reduce ammonia emissions across Northern Ireland. These measures include legislation already implemented through the Nutrients Action Programme which will reduce ammonia emissions, as well as protect water quality, by phasing in a requirement to use low emission slurry spreading equipment on many farms and requiring a cover on all new above ground slurry stores. I intend to consult on a comprehensive strategy to reduce ammonia later this year.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on Northern Ireland's (i) progress; and (ii) contribution to the UK obligation to reduce ammonia emissions.

(AQW 2318/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department is developing a comprehensive strategy to reduce ammonia emissions which will assist in achieving the UK's international obligations on ammonia. Northern Ireland is responsible for 12% of UK ammonia emissions.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to implement a sustainable land management strategy that would fulfil the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Three.

(AQW 2336/17-22)

Mr Poots: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Three is aimed at ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all ages. My Department is currently progressing a number of pilot measures under recommendations made in a Sustainable Agriculture Land Management Strategy for Northern Ireland aimed at improving soil health, water quality and environmental performance.

In particular, pilot soil sampling and analysis schemes across three Northern Ireland water catchment areas and one NI wide element have been conducted. These schemes include the production of phosphorus run-off risk maps that can be used by farmers to identify hydrologically sensitive areas posing a risk to water quality, thereby facilitating targeted application of nutrients and the siting of mitigation measures such as riparian buffer strips.

The schemes also encourage farmers to use their soil test results to develop a live nutrient management plan to ensure only the required nutrients are applied based on crop and soil need, to improve soil health and on farm efficiency.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what (i) proposed; or (ii) extra requirements will be necessary for thoroughbred horses reared in Northern Ireland to be sold at auction sales in Republic of Ireland following Brexit.

(AQW 2347/17-22)

Mr Poots: No changes have been introduced to the requirements for the movement of horses during the transition period following the UK's exit from the EU. Horses can therefore continue to move freely between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland during this time.

All horses must however, as before, be identified under the Equine Identification Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 and must be accompanied by a valid horse passport at all times.

All of the relevant guidance is available on the DAERA website, <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/>.

Vendors should also contact their sales company, in advance, for up to date sales advice and conditions of sale.

Arrangements following the transition period will depend on the outcome of UK negotiations with the EU which will take place in the interim. Further information will be posted on the DAERA website as it becomes available.

Please be assured that my officials continue to engage closely with their counterparts in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on these matters and will ensure that the thoroughbred industry is included in any future relevant stakeholder briefing sessions.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to Section 2 of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, whether his Department has provided any guidance to the Education Authority in respect of rural needs on the subject matter of school closures, either (i) specific to an individual proposal; or (ii) generically.

(AQW 2363/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department has not provided any guidance to the Education Authority under section 2 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 in respect of rural needs either (i) specific to an individual proposal for a school closure or (ii) in relation to school closures generally.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to Section 3 of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, whether any directions have been issued to the Education Authority.

(AQW 2364/17-22)

Mr Poots: My department has not issued any directions under Section 3 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 to the Education Authority. It has issued guidance to the Education Authority entitled "A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities April 2018". This includes a template which public authorities are requested to complete to inform the development of the Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, whether (i) his Department has considered the matter of rural need in respect of the proposal to close Carnalbanagh Primary School; and (ii) if not, will such consideration now be undertaken.

(AQW 2365/17-22)

Mr Poots: DAERA has not considered rural needs in respect of the proposal to close Carnalbanagh Primary School. The Department of Education has confirmed that the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 are being considered at all stages of the Development Proposal process in relation to Carnalbanagh Primary School.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether (i) Tully Biogas Plant is compliant with its operating licence; and (ii) he has plans to review the terms of the licence.

(AQW 2385/17-22)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Tully Biogas Plant was inspected on 23 January 2020 and was in compliance with its permit.
- (ii) The Department plans to review the Tully Biogas Plant permit by August 2022 to take into account the conclusions on best available techniques for waste treatment facilities published by the European Commission in August 2018.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) what plans he has to review legislation related to Japanese knotweed; and (ii) whether he would consider introducing measures designed to address Japanese knotweed similar to those contained in the Infrastructure Act (2015).

(AQW 2386/17-22)

Mr Poots: I currently have no plans to review legislation related to Japanese knotweed or to introduce similar measures to those contained in the Infrastructure Act 2015.

The intent of the 2015 provisions is primarily to remove newly arrived invasive species or those of relatively restricted distribution. It is not envisaged that these powers would be used to control Invasive Species such as Japanese Knotweed, which is widespread and well established across Northern Ireland.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment whether planning conditions 2, 3 and 4, imposed on planning permission H/2009/0645/F at the request of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to protect Ballynahone Bog Special Area of Conservation, have been complied with to the satisfaction of his Department.
(AQW 2469/17-22)

Mr Poots: It is the responsibility of the Planning Authority to set and ensure compliance with conditions of approval which form part of the decision notice issued when planning approval is given.

Following local government reform in April 2015, the bulk of planning functions transferred from the Department of the Environment to local councils. At this time, planning records, including records on compliance with planning conditions, were transferred to local councils. The Department has not received a monitoring report for this development.

The Department is liaising with the Planning Authority in relation to this.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) all fees and costs paid; and (ii) to be paid, to the Department by the applicant for Marine Licence ML28_12, broken down by (a) dates on which payments were received; and (b) the purpose for each payment.
(AQW 2470/17-22)

Mr Poots: DAERA's Marine Strategy and Licensing Team received the sum of £11,086 on 22 October 2012 in payment for marine licence ML28_12. This is a one-off fee and should the licence be granted, no further annual marine licensing fees will be charged. A separate marine licence will be required to decommission the project. It is not possible to estimate the cost of this at present.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, which is also part of DAERA, received £931 from the applicant on 22/10/2012 for a Consent to Discharge application for effluent arising from the pumping station of the gas storage facility and £142 on 24 October 2012 in respect of an Abstraction and Impoundment Licence (AIL) application. Both of these consents are required as part of the construction of the proposed Islandmagee gas storage project. The applicant would be liable for further charges should there be any significant changes to the proposed project.

Miss Woods asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for his assessment of how the UK Government's proposals to change the immigration system from 1 January 2021 will affect the agri-food industry.
(AQW 2471/17-22)

Mr Poots: The new system will make it difficult for businesses in our agri-food industry to recruit the workers that they need going forward. The Northern Ireland agri-food industry is relatively more reliant on migrant labour than most other sectors of the NI economy and the agri-food industry in the UK as a whole.

In 2017, migrant employees made up 20 per cent of the paid labour force in NI agriculture and 44 per cent of the total food and drink processing sector workforce. The vast majority of migrants in the processing sector were employed in lower skilled manual occupations such as process, plant and machine operatives. Restrictions on low-skilled migration under the new system will negatively affect the supply of labour to the NI agri-food sector, which will likely increase costs to businesses.

Given the significant dependence on migrant labour within the sector and the continued free movement of goods between NI and the EU, there are concerns that restricted access to labour in NI could adversely affect the competitiveness of our agri-food businesses compared to EU countries that will continue to benefit from freedom of movement. This is particularly concerning for NI given the lower geographic barriers to trade with and similar sectoral structure to the Republic of Ireland.

Access to labour has been and remains important to ensuring that our agri-food businesses are able to continue to thrive in both the near and long term future.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he will bring forward legislation in relation to dog socialisation.
(AQW 2505/17-22)

Mr Poots: I am aware of the modern day demands for a wider range of facilities around animal boarding establishments, including expectations around the socialisation of dogs. I am committed to instigating reform to modernise the regulation of animal boarding establishments while maintaining high welfare standards and continuing to protect the well-being of pets.

I have therefore asked my Chief Veterinary Officer to work with the industry, set up a working group to identify the best way forward and progress this matter in a timely manner.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for an update on the future of the Aquaculture Initiative; and (ii) whether there are safeguards in place for its future, following Brexit.

(AQW 2507/17-22)

Mr Poots: Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) has recently advised my Department that, for legal reasons, the Aquaculture Initiative in Northern Ireland can no longer operate after 31 March 2020. Recognising the importance of having an advisory and support service for the Aquaculture Sector following Brexit, my Department is currently looking at alternative delivery options for the provision of such a service.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) how many Areas of Natural Constraint payments were made; and (ii) how much match funding was provided for this scheme under the Rural Development Programme, for each year between 2014 and 2016.

(AQW 2741/17-22)

Mr Poots: In years 2014 and 2015 the Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances (LFACA) Scheme was part of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme. The LFACA Scheme was replaced in 2016 by the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme.

The number of payments made and the national match funding for each of the years from 2014 to 2016 under the LFACA Scheme and the replacement ANC scheme is set out in the table below: -

Scheme Year	Scheme	Number of Payments	National Funding
2014	LFACA	13,399	£8,365,634
2015	LFACA	13,411	£8,377,406
2016	ANC	9,055	£7,470,120.44

Department for Communities

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment on (i) how; and (ii) when the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer will be allocated.

(AQW 226/17-22)

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities): Advancement of plans to complete the Sub Regional Stadia Programme is one of the commitments in the “New Decade, New Approach” agreement.

Since the initial consultation exercise, there have been a number of changes within the football landscape. It is therefore vital that the programme specification, objectives and deliverables are subject to review.

I am fully committed to delivering on this priority area and to meeting the current and future needs of the game. To this end, I have asked my officials to engage with key stakeholders in developing detailed implementation plans for the Sub Regional Stadia Programme.

On receipt of the findings from this engagement, I will be able to consider next steps.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities whether (i) she plans to end the use of Capita as the Personal Independence Payment assessment service; and (ii) she has plans to bring benefit assessments in-house.

(AQW 358/17-22)

Ms Hargey:

- (i) The Department for Communities' contract with Capita Business Services Ltd, for the delivery of Personal Independence Payment assessments, will expire on 31 July 2021.
- (ii) I will be considering this contract and impact in the time ahead.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what steps she is taking to reduce the number of applicants on waiting lists for social housing.

(AQW 513/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In line with New Decade, New Approach, I intend to work with Executive colleagues to progress measures that will reduce numbers in housing stress, and reduce the number of applicants on waiting lists for social housing.

These measures will include:

- enabling housing associations to continue building new social and intermediate homes by bringing forward legislation to facilitate reversal of the Office for National Statistics' classification of Housing Associations as Non-Financial Public Corporations;

- enhancing investment and agreeing a target for new social and affordable home starts; and
- tackling the maintenance backlog for Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties.

Housing will continue to be a priority within a new Programme for Government. The specific housing outcome and indicators, which will focus on ensuring every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs, will be supported by robust programmes and actions.

My Department continues to direct the significant majority of its capital budget spend to the delivery of new social homes via the Social Housing Development Programme. In 2019/20, £146 million has been allocated against a target to start building 1850 new social homes.

With finite budgets there is a need to ensure that existing stock is used and allocated appropriately. You are aware of the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations (AQW 250/17-22 refers). This has produced a range of proposals that aim to make the allocations system more fair, transparent and effective for all in housing need. Analysis of stakeholder feedback regarding these proposals has been completed by officials. I will consider the Review and possible next steps in the coming weeks.

My Department is also exploring a range of supply options to meet demand across all tenures, including the viability of a range of affordable housing products. These options have the potential to assist those seeking to access rented accommodation and should help reduce pressure on the social housing waiting list.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Communities for an update on her Department's plans for the allocation and distribution of funding to Irish League Football clubs for the development of regional stadia.
(AQW 966/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Sub Regional Stadia Programme is one of the commitments in the "New Decade, New Approach" Agreement and its delivery clearly provides a real opportunity to contribute to the delivery of wider government priorities and to address a range of social, economic and cultural needs, whilst also meeting the needs of the football family.

Improvements to existing stadia and any new developments must prioritise health and safety provision, be fully accessible, inclusive, sustainable and be based on realistic need.

I am fully committed to delivering on this priority area and to ensuring that the Executive endorsed programme meets the current and future needs of the game. To do that, further work needs to be done to inform the development of detailed plans and that must involve the key stakeholders who oversee the game, operate the facilities, support football and play the sport at all levels.

To this end, I have asked my officials to take forward work to engage with and seek the views of the football sector and the key strategic stakeholders. Once this engagement has been completed, I will then consider proposals to take the Programme forward.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities whether she plans to reduce the pension age to 65.
(AQW 1072/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I have asked my Departmental officials to review the options available in respect of pensionable age. The Assembly will determine any future change.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities (i) whether she will commit to ensuring that a proportion of any increased target for new social homes is for sheltered and supported housing; (ii) whether sheltered housing will be considered a strategically relevant service in the forthcoming reforms to the Supporting People programme; and (iii) if this has yet to be decided, when the decision will be made, and on what basis.
(AQW 1531/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am committed to a focus on objective need. Requirements for new social homes, regardless of need group, are assessed by the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive delivers appropriate new supported and/or sheltered housing solutions to meet identified housing needs through the Supporting People Programme and the Social Housing Development Programme.

It is the view of the Housing Executive there will be a continued demand for new supported and/or sheltered housing solutions. In order to increase future supply and maintain appropriate levels of delivery for clients with housing support needs, additional funding will be required.

Sheltered housing remains a strategically relevant model within the range of housing related support services. The Housing Executive is preparing a three year Supporting People strategy for 2020-2023, which I understand will be ready for public consultation at the end of March 2020.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail the staffing compliment of the Office of the Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner; and its budget.
(AQW 1677/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Local Government Commissioner for Standards is an independent operating authority. My Department does not hold the details of the staffing complement or details of its overall budget.

However, the Commissioner publishes an Annual Report each year that contains funding and expenditure information, and this is available on the Commissioner's website.

<https://nipso.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NILGCS-Annual-Report-2017-18.pdf>

My Department is aware that the allocated baseline funding from councils to the Commissioner for 2019/20 was £541k.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Communities (i) whether her Department will release a Community Festivals Fund for 2020/21; if so (ii) when this will be made available to local councils; and (iii) how much will be allocated to this fund. **(AQW 1708/17-22)**

Ms Hargey: The Community Festivals Fund was launched in 2006 in recognition of the positive contribution that festivals can make to communities, the local economy, and wider Government policy priorities. It was awarded £369k in 2019-20. This is match funded by local Councils.

Departmental budgets have not yet been set for 2020-21. Final decisions on the allocation and availability of funding cannot be confirmed until the opening budget position is known. Subject to budget, the Department will consider the release of a Community Festivals Fund for 2020-21 to local councils.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Communities to detail the departmental supported projects for young adults with learning disabilities in Upper Bann. **(AQW 1726/17-22)**

Ms Hargey: My Department is fully committed to supporting people with disabilities, and does this through a wide range of projects and initiatives.

For example, this includes supporting delivery of the disability sector's 'Active Living: No Limits' Action Plan which aims to bring about positive change to the social, recreational and sporting life of people with disabilities, and funding projects such as the Special Olympics.

My Department supports vulnerable people, including young adults with learning disabilities, through the Supporting People Programme which helps people live more independently. There are four services that provide support for young adults with learning disabilities in Upper Bann:

Accommodation Services	Units	Unit Rate	Contract Value	Age Group
Riversley Housing Complex (Shared Accommodation), Church Street, Banbridge	8	£365.49	£152,043.84	All ages
Autism initiatives , Boy'd Row, Armagh	3	370.26	£57,760.56	All ages
Riversley Housing Complex (Supported Accommodation), church Street, Banbridge	9	£127.20	£59,529.60	All ages
Knock Eden, Edenderry Gardens, Gilford, Portadown	16	£221.85	£184.579.20	18 – 95+

My Department supports projects which assist people with disabilities towards employment and nine of these projects include Upper Bann within their catchment area. Four are specifically for people with learning disabilities – 'Mencap – Employability 2' offering specialist employment support; 'Specialisterne (Recruit+)' which supports economically inactive individuals who are on the Autistic Spectrum; 'Specialisterne (Recruit++)' which supports autistic people to access employment and feel socially connected; and 'Stepping Stones NI - Stepping Stones to Employment' which provides people with learning disabilities/difficulties who are unemployed or economically inactive with a supported employment programme.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Communities whether she has any plans to change the rules around people recording their Personal Independence Payment assessments. **(AQW 1823/17-22)**

Ms Hargey: From 18 November 2019 my Department has provided the service for people who wish to have an audio recording made of their Personal Independence Payment assessment carried out in an assessment centre. People are advised that the service is available in the letter informing them about the appointment for the assessment. Plans are being finalised to roll that service out in spring 2020 for assessments carried out in the home.

A person, if they so wish, may also use their own equipment to record the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment, in line with current guidance.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Communities how many Personal Independence Payment appeals by claimants were successful in each of the last three years; and what this represents as a percentage of all the appeals made.

(AQW 1827/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The number of Personal Independence Payment appeals by claimants that were successful in each of the last three years and what this represents as a percentage of all the appeals made is outlined in the table below.

	Total Number of All Appeals	Total Number of All PIP Appeals	Total Number of Successful PIP Appeals	Successful PIP Appeals as a % of all PIP Appeals Received	Successful PIP Appeals as a % of all Appeals Received
2017/2018	10,959	7,329	1,467	20.1%	13.4%
2018/2019	11,443	8,752	3,088	35.3%	27.0%
April 2019 – December 2019	6,393	4,371	2,747	62.8%	43.9%

Mrs Armstrong asked the Minister for Communities for an update on her Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.

(AQW 1864/17-22)

Ms Hargey: An Executive sub-committee on EU Exit issues has been established to ensure that Ministers can provide strategic oversight and direction to work across all Departments to understand the implications and practical delivery of the Protocol.

Currently, four members of staff within the Department have direct responsibilities for the work on the Protocol.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the number of Personal Independence Payment appeals in (a) 2018/19; and (b) 2019/20, broken down by constituency; (ii) how many of these appeals were successful in having the appellants points increased; and (iii) what was the cost of appeals in each year.

(AQW 1870/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department does not hold information on the number of appeals received per constituency but holds information on the number of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appeals received per region and this is outlined in the table below.

Venue	2018/2019	April 2019 – December 2019
Armagh	96	111
Ballymena	933	227
Ballymoney	132	66
Banbridge	189	90
Belfast	3,644	1,775
Coleraine	297	113
Cookstown	125	60
Craigavon	518	278
Downpatrick	471	163
Dungannon	341	172
Enniskillen	339	153
Limavady	73	51
Londonderry	469	251
Magherafelt	167	72
Newry	465	234
Newtownards	464	254
Omagh	306	191
Strabane	157	110
Total	8,752	4,371

The table below outlines the number of successful PIP appeals and what this represents as a percentage of all the appeals received and of all PIP appeals received.

	Total number of Appeals Received	Total number of PIP Appeals Received	Successful PIP Appeals	Successful PIP Appeals as % off all Appeals Received	Successful PIP Appeals as % of all PIP Appeals Received
2018/2019	11,443	8,752	3,088	27.0%	35.3%
April 2019 – December 2019	6,393	4,371	2,747	42.9%	62.8%

The cost of running the Appeals Service (TAS) for 2018/2019 was £9m and for April 2019 to December 2019 was £7.65m.

The average cost of an individual appeal from start to finish is £545.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of (a) social homes; and (b) affordable homes that will be built in the next ten years; and (ii) the budget for these homes.

(AQW 1877/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The number of new social and affordable homes that will be provided over the next ten years will be determined by future budget and policy decisions over this and the next two mandates. Indeed, the targets and budgets for social and affordable homes for 20/21 have yet to be determined.

It is possible, however, to anticipate positive developments. New Decade, New Approach, committed the Executive to “enhanced investment in new social and affordable home starts”. In line with this commitment we should anticipate increases on 19/20 levels of investment. The 19/20 investment in new social starts was £146m. The 19/20 investment in intermediate housing, which is delivered through the Co-Ownership shared ownership scheme, was £34m.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities which services are to be considered strategically relevant in the forthcoming reforms to the Supporting People programme; and how and when strategic relevance will be determined.

(AQW 1893/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive is preparing a three year Supporting People strategy for 2020-2023, which will consider existing needs and emerging demands. The main thematic areas of Learning and Disability, Young People, Older People and Homelessness remain strategically relevant and will feature in the forthcoming strategy, which I understand will be ready for public consultation at the end of March 2020.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how she will ensure that people with support needs have the same right to appropriate social housing as able-bodied people; and how she will ensure that sufficient new social housing, and the necessary accompanying housing support, is commissioned through the Social Housing Development Programme and Supporting People programme.

(AQW 1894/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive is committed to delivering appropriate new supported housing solutions to meet identified housing needs through the Supporting People Programme and the Social Housing Development Programme. Over the past 10 years, the Housing Executive has enabled the delivery of a total of 94 supported (including sheltered) housing schemes which provided 1,061 new units of accommodation with an associated capital investment of £79m via Housing Association Grant funding. Currently, 47.5% (£34,579m) of the overall Supporting People revenue budget (£72.798m) is utilised to provide on-going long-term accommodation-based housing support services.

All new supported housing is initiated via a multi-agency approach. A business case demonstrating the requirement for an accommodation-based solution is considered by the Strategic Advisory Board, which if approved, is added to the Social Housing Development Programme. The Housing Executive will then work with an appropriate Housing Association development partner to agree any capital funding. Supported housing includes solutions across clients with learning disabilities, mental health issues, older people, younger people and homelessness.

In the longer term, it is the view of the Housing Executive that there will be a continued demand for new supported housing solutions. In order to increase future supply and maintain appropriate levels of delivery for clients with housing support needs, additional funding will be required. The Housing Executive’s Supporting People team will continue to engage with providers to address how best to meet the evolving needs of people within our communities.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the percentage of the Supporting People budget to deliver services for older people; and whether she intends to increase this proportion to meet the needs of an ageing population.

(AQW 1896/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The total 2019/20 Supporting People budget is £72.798m. The percentage of the Supporting People budget to deliver services for older people is 12.6%, which equates to £9.161m. These services support approximately 11,000 older people by funding 419 schemes to deliver support to those living in sheltered accommodation; bespoke dementia services; and floating and peripatetic support to older people living in their own homes.

The Housing Executive is preparing a three year Supporting People strategy for 2020-2023, which will consider existing needs and emerging demands, including those of older people. Consideration of available evidence including demographic trends will inform the Strategy prior to public consultation at the end of March 2020.

The Housing Executive has also advised that it will publish a Strategic Needs Assessment for the Supporting People Programme in September 2020.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for Communities what the average estimated cost is of retrofitting a Housing Executive property to ensure it reaches (i) a B energy efficiency rating; and (ii) an A energy efficiency rating.

(AQW 1901/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive is currently preparing a new Energy Strategy, the preparatory work for which includes assessing the measures and associated costs required to achieve various energy efficiency ratings. Therefore, the information that has been requested is not available at this time.

However, a research scheme that retrofitted five Housing Executive properties in Newry suggests the following:

- i An average cost of £22,000 to achieve Standard Assessment Procedure(SAP) B
- ii. An average cost of £25,000 to £30,000 to achieve SAP A

It should be noted that such costs will vary across the stock depending on type, size, construction and existing energy performance.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for Communities to detail the energy efficiency of the current Housing Executive housing stock, including the total number of houses under the control of the Housing Executive, and a breakdown of the energy ratings of these homes by category.

(AQW 1902/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The current Housing Executive stock total is 84,948 dwellings.

Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) is the methodology used to assess and compare the energy and environmental performance of dwellings. The following average SAP scores for the Housing Executive's stock are based on an analysis of the Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) held for individual dwellings. Some 87% of the dwellings have EPCs. The average SAP score for the stock as a whole is 63.

The average SAP score by property type is:

- Bedsit - 66
- Bungalow – 60
- Cottage – 50
- Flat – 66
- House – 63
- Maisonette – 64

The average SAP score by dwelling size is:

- 1 bedroom – 63
- 2 bedrooms – 63
- 3 bedrooms – 63
- 4 bedrooms – 61
- 5+ bedrooms - 62

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Communities how her Department has ensured that projects under the Together: Building a United Community strategy are inclusive of all societal groups beyond the two traditionally largest communities.

(AQW 1911/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is responsible for delivery of two of the headline actions under the T:BUC Strategy, the Uniting Communities through sport and creativity programme and the creation of 10 new shared neighbourhood developments.

In relation to the Uniting Communities through sport and creativity programme, my officials carry out sustained stakeholder engagement prior to delivery in each geographical area which includes local Councils, PSNI, schools, clubs and churches. This approach establishes a network of local community links and provides a solid platform from which to reach out to all young people and promote the cross community and inclusiveness aspects of the programme.

To bolster this approach the appointed delivery partner for each area is required to demonstrate that their action plan ensures that the numbers of young people participating is representative of the area in terms of gender, ethnicity, religious background and disability. To remove barriers to participation training and activity sessions are fully accessible to all young people for the duration of the programme and at no cost.

A key element of the Uniting Communities through sport and creativity programme is the T:BUC Uniting Opportunities Grant Scheme which funds short-term intervention projects that support marginalised young people in the following groups: Young and Homeless, Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Young People in Care, Young People with a Disability, Young People with Poor Mental Health and/or Addictions, Young Offenders (and young people most at risk of offending) and Young people at risk of rural isolation.

In relation to housing the 10 shared schemes have been completed and the housing units have been allocated using the Housing Selection Scheme which allocates social housing on the basis of objective housing need.

The shared schemes are supported through five-year Good Relations Plans which include projects and events which are delivered between the new shared residents and residents from the surrounding communities within a five-mile radius. The Plans are developed and supported by Advisory Groups comprising residents, local stakeholders and statutory bodies. The funding available is non prescriptive allowing flexibility to deliver good relations activities which best meet the needs of all participating communities.

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Communities to detail the successful appeal rate to Personal Independent Payment reviews by claimants residing in the North Antrim constituency, in each year since its introduction.

(AQW 1982/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department does not hold information on the number of Personal Independent Payment appeals received per constituency or the success rate of a Personal Independent Payment appeal by constituency.

However, the number of successful Personal Independence Payment appeals as a percentage of all the Personal Independence Payment appeals received are set out in the table below:

Year	Total Number of PIP Appeals Received	Total Number of Successful PIP Appeals	% of PIP Appeals that were successful
2016/2017*	4,874	9	0.2%
2017/2018	7,329	1,467	20.0%
2018/2019	8,752	3,088	35.3%
April 2019 – December 2019	4,371	2,747	62.8%

*PIP came into effect in June 2016, replacing Disability Living Allowance.

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Communities what steps his Department will take to strengthen library services provision on Rathlin Island.

(AQW 1983/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I recognise the importance of the library service and the vital role it provides to the communities they serve, especially those who live in remote areas.

Through Libraries NI, a Door to Door delivery service to Rathlin Island is provided on the first Friday of each month (weather permitting). It currently has 49 regular customers who use this facility. Library customers on Rathlin Island also avail of Libraries NI's online services including access to e-books and magazines. Libraries NI has no current plans to increase this service at this time, but will continue to monitor service levels.

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Communities for an update on her plans to implement the previous Executive's economic inactivity strategy.

(AQW 1992/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The previous Executive's strategy for addressing the high economic inactivity rate entitled 'Enabling Success' was a joint strategy between the former Department for Economy, Trade and Investment and the former Department for Employment and Learning.

The 'Enabling Success' strategy is no longer active, however some of the principles contained within the strategy around addressing economic inactivity holds relevance as the economic inactivity rate remains high.

My Department is targeting our resources to ensure that, in line with the draft Programme for Government Outcomes framework, the Economic Strategy and the draft Social Strategy, we engage with those furthest from work and in those areas with the lowest employment rates with the aim of closing those gaps.

Employability NI was established in November 2018 and will design, procure and implement the future employment offer developed by the Department for Communities to support people into employment. The Employability NI framework of support aims to transform the delivery of employability provision by responding in an agile manner to local labour market challenges.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 1169/17-22, (i) how much funding has been secured for the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme; (ii) why Ministerial decisions were not taken in relation to programme proposals, finance and publication of the consultation report; (iii) by what date should these decisions have been taken and by which Ministers; (iv) what the impact is of these decisions not being taken; (v) when she will publish the consultation report; (vi) how long her review of this programme will take; and (vii) whether, as part of this review, she will meet with clubs as key stakeholders.

(AQW 2044/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Further to my response to AQW 1169/17-22 on 11 February, I can advise that £36.2 million was endorsed by the Executive in March 2011 to deliver a Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.

While decisions taken, or not taken, by previous Ministers are a matter for those Ministers, those decisions and the passage of time have had an impact on the development of the Programme.

Looking forward, for my part, I am fully committed to delivering on this priority area by engaging with key stakeholders to develop a programme to transform soccer at all levels by addressing the current and future needs of the game.

I have asked my officials to progress the Programme and engagement has begun with key stakeholders. When this initial phase of engagement has completed, I will consider how further engagement should be taken forward.

I welcome the opportunity to engage directly with the football family, however, given that there are over 1000 clubs competing at various levels and disciplines of football, it would not be feasible for me to meet with each of them. I have asked my officials to provide me with some options around future engagement.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the impact that constraints on funding for the Supporting People programme will have on Health and Social Care Trusts' commissioning of supported living services by private providers; and how much Housing Benefit has been paid to tenants of privately supported living schemes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2057/17-22)

Ms Hargey: All new Supported Housing Services are initiated via a multi-agency approach which includes representation from both the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board. A business case demonstrating the requirement for a supported living service would be considered by the Strategic Advisory Board, and if recommended, the Housing Executive Board and Executive will consider this strategic funding priority.

Of the 12 Supported Housing Services considered from 2017 onwards, which have been, or are due to be in receipt of financial assistance, 10 of the Services receive joint funding from or are run by a Health and Social Care Trust.

It is the view of the Housing Executive there will be a continued demand for new Supported Housing solutions. In order to increase future supply and maintain appropriate levels of delivery for clients with housing support needs, it is anticipated that additional funding will be required. The Housing Executive's Supporting People team will continue to engage with providers to address how best to meet the evolving needs of people within Northern Ireland.

The Housing Executive do not record Housing Benefit expenditure for Supported Accommodation separately. The vast majority of supported accommodation falls within the voluntary sector and housing associations as opposed to the private sector.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what her Department has done to promote and recognise karate as a sport.

(AQW 2058/17-22)

Ms Hargey: SportNI, an arms-length body of my Department, provides advice and guidance to support Governing Bodies of sport in the management and promotion of their sports, including areas such as strategic planning, raising performance standards, sourcing funding, employment matters and good practice. This provision is available to all Governing Bodies including karate.

SportNI provided support to the Northern Ireland Karate Board (NIKA) with regard to the sports recognition process in 2013. This resulted in the Board continuing to be recognised as the Governing Body for Karate.

Whilst SportNI do not directly fund NIKA, they fund the Sports Forum which has a role in supporting and working with Karate and other organisations who are not directly funded through SportNI programmes.

Karate Clubs have benefited from other initiatives including the provision of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) to sports clubs with ten karate clubs receiving volunteer training and an AED unit.

Karate Clubs could also apply for funding through a number of Department for Communities schemes including the Small Capital Grants Programme for assistance with equipment and the Volunteering and Innovation Fund.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities whether she or her departmental officials have had any discussions with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) regarding a reduction in the proposed capacity of Casement Park and the associated costs. (AQW 2061/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The original design proposed by UCGAA for the Casement Park project was for a 38,000 seater stadium. Planning Permission was granted for 38,000 but was quashed in December 2014 at Judicial Review (JR).

The revised design for the stadium has a proposed capacity of 34,186. This reduced capacity design addresses all of the concerns raised at JR and is smaller than the first, both in height and scale.

This reduced capacity is being considered by the Department for Infrastructure as part of the Planning Application assessment.

As I have learned through detailed briefings on this project, there is not a direct correlation between reductions in seating numbers and reductions in estimated cost. However, the cost estimates associated with the revised design are being robustly scrutinised as part of the ongoing UCGAA Full Business Case (FBC) review.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities for an update on Housing Executive plans for tower blocks in North Belfast; and to detail the Housing Executive's communication with residents informing them of these plans. (AQW 2065/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Following the Board decision in May 2018 to consider the future of tower blocks, a major consultation exercise was carried out by North Belfast Area Office between September 2018 and December 2018 in relation to the nine Tower Blocks in the north of the city.

Following completion of the consultation exercise, the Area Office then met in January 2019 with The Seven Towers Residents Association and with the Mount Vernon Community Development Forum to advise as to the outcome of the consultation exercise and to detail next steps.

From that time, the Housing Executive have continued to keep stakeholders informed of the progress of the strategy at a variety of forums including community group meetings, various interagency meetings as well as through the Housing Community Network.

The Tower Blocks Action Plan was approved by the Board of the Housing Executive in March 2019 and by the Department for Communities in August 2019. The proposals for the tower blocks in North Belfast set out in the Action Plan can be seen in Table 1 below.

The Housing Executive are now preparing individual business cases for each of the blocks (or group of blocks as appropriate) for Departmental approval. They have reassured residents and their representatives that further consultation is planned once outcomes are known.

The Housing Executive has provided early detail to residents of the planned investment programme for elements such as Bathroom/Kitchens and Heating. They have also committed to providing further information, when known.

The Area Office is very aware of the level of interest in the progress of the Tower Block Safety and going forward, they will of course continue to fully consult with stakeholders as developments occur.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline her proposals for providing equality of access to, and support for, people who are blind and partially sighted and seeking employment. (AQW 2091/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is fully committed to supporting people with disabilities and health conditions progress towards, move into and stay in employment, and does this through a number of programmes.

The Access to Work programme aims to assist people with disabilities who are either in paid employment, or who have been offered a job but need assistance in place to take up that offer. This is done through the provision of practical and financial support to overcome work related obstacles that may result from having a disability

Access to Work can help towards the cost of the provision of special aids and equipment to suit particular work needs arising from disability including those who are blind or partially sighted. Access to Work is delivered by 3 Providers contracted by the Department, including Access Centre NI Ltd, the provider for people who are blind or partially sighted.

The Workable programme provides appropriate supports to assist people with disabilities aged 16 and over, integrate into the workplace. The Programme helps people with substantial disability related barriers to employment, including those with a sight impairment, to secure and retain paid employment and help those who are in danger of losing their job due to the effects of their disability, to keep their job. Workable provides one to one support and an opportunity for people to progress towards being able to work unsupported in their working environment. Workable is delivered by 3 Providers contracted by the Department for Communities, including Supported Employment Solutions, a consortium of 7 disability organisations, one of which is the Royal National Institute of Blind People.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Communities what support she will put in place for people on Universal Credit who wish to become self-employed.

(AQW 2098/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The introduction of Universal Credit altered the approach in respect of benefits for people in self-employment. Newly self-employed people on Universal Credit may receive a 'start-up period' of up to one year where they will continue to receive Universal Credit payments based on their circumstances. Within the start-up period people will:

- receive Universal Credit payment based on their actual earnings;
- not be subject to job search requirements; and
- attend four quarterly meetings with a Work Coach to check they are still gainfully self-employed and taking steps to increase their earnings.

During this period Universal Credit payments will only be subject to a tapered earnings deduction if the business is profitable, taking any previous losses into account.

Fully trained work coaches based in our network of 35 Jobs & Benefits offices will support and encourage people who are interested in self-employment to take steps to explore the viability of their business idea. Work coaches have access to external sources of advice and support for self-employed people. They will actively support and signpost individuals to online resources, Local Councils and Enterprise Agencies to provide expert business advice and assist them to develop their business.

My Department is currently considering a range of options in respect of self-employment and how best to further assist people in this category. In the meantime, there is a range of support for people planning to set up their own business or considering self-employment. Useful information on starting up your own business and the support available can be found on nidirect (see link below).

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/starting-your-own-business>

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Communities whether she will raise the issue of charitable donations made by Wright Bus and Cornerstone Group and received by Green Pastures Church with the Charity Commission.

(AQW 2110/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department has no role in this matter. The Charity Commission has no remit to investigate the actions of Wrightbus, given that it was a private company until entering administration in September 2019.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the current waiting lists for social housing, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 2125/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The following table provided by the Housing Executive details the social housing waiting list on the final day of the last available quarter (31 December 2019), broken down by Parliamentary Constituency.

Parliamentary Constituency	No.
Belfast East	1889
Belfast East/South	378
Belfast North	3942
Belfast South	2516
Belfast South/Strangford	102
Belfast West	3489
Belfast West/North	101
Belfast West/South	26
East Antrim	1527
East Londonderry	1970
Fermanagh South Tyrone	1728
Foyle	3785
Lagan Valley	1754
Mid Ulster	1099
Newry & Armagh	1988

Parliamentary Constituency	No.
North Antrim	2102
North Down	1648
South Antrim	1408
South Down	1700
Strangford	1373
Upper Bann	2300
West Tyrone	1483
Total	38308

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 1013/17-22, whether she will introduce a scheme equivalent to the New Enterprise Allowance, currently available in Great Britain.

(AQW 2132/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The introduction of Universal Credit altered the approach in respect of benefits for people in self-employment. Newly self-employed people on Universal Credit may receive a 'start-up period' of up to one year where they will continue to receive Universal Credit payments based on their circumstances. Within the start-up period people will –

- receive UC based on their actual earnings
- not be subject to job search requirements
- attend 4 quarterly meetings with a Work Coach to check they are still gainfully self-employed and taking steps to increase their earnings.

During this period Universal Credit payments will only be subject to a tapered earnings deduction if the business is profitable, taking any previous losses into account.

Work Coaches based in the network of 35 Jobs and Benefits Offices will support and encourage people who are interested in self-employment to take steps to explore the viability of their business idea. Work coaches have access to external sources of advice and support for self-employed people. They will actively support and sign post individuals to online resources, Local Councils and Enterprise Agencies to provide expert business advice and assist them to develop their business.

My Department is currently considering a range of options in respect of self-employment and how best to further assist people in this category, this will include assessing the viability of support equivalent to that which is available in Britain. All options will be assessed for affordability considering current budgetary constraints. In the meantime, there is a range of support for people planning to set up their own business or considering self-employment. Useful information on starting up your own business and the support available can be found on nidirect (see link below).

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/starting-your-own-business>

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Communities how many rugby clubs there are in Northern Ireland; and for her Department's assessment on the adequacy of the facilities available for women's and girl's teams.

(AQW 2134/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I can confirm that there are 43 rugby clubs affiliated to the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) Ulster Branch. The Department does not hold information on rugby club facilities, in terms of accessibility or the adequacy of the facilities for women's and girls' teams.

However, officials are aware that the IRFU's Strategic Plan sets out a vision to build a strong base to grow the women's game and deliver a vibrant club and school network. The Department has, as part of the legacy of hosting the Women's Rugby World Cup Finals in 2017, provided £68,000 to the IRFU Ulster Branch to deliver a range of programmes to increase participation opportunities for females to get involved in rugby.

My officials have recently engaged with the IRFU (Ulster Branch) to hear about its progress in growing the female game here.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Communities what funding is available for rugby clubs to upgrade their facilities.

(AQW 2135/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I can confirm that my Department and Sport NI are considering a number of capital funding programmes which may be available for rugby clubs to apply to for the upgrade of facilities. These will be dependent on the outcome of the budget settlement 2020/21.

The programmes under consideration by my Department include the Small Capital Grants Programme and the Access and Inclusion Programme.

Sport NI is developing programmes that will provide improved infrastructure, address health and safety issues and provide better access and inclusion for participants involved in sport and physical activity.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Communities what strategy is in place to grow women's rugby.
(AQW 2136/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The development of women's rugby in the north of Ireland is primarily the responsibility of the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union.

As the governing body for Rugby in Ireland, the Irish Rugby Football Union developed its latest Strategic Plan, covering the period 2018-2023, and entitled: 'Irish Rugby: Building Success, Together.'

Underpinning this strategy is the 'Women in Rugby Action Plan 2018-2023,' that aims to achieve the following objectives over the course of the next five years:-

- To be a sport of equal opportunity and access for all;
- To optimise the quality of experience provided for female rugby players;
- To drive a performance system that demands and supports development and competitive excellence; and
- To increase female participation to 20%, or more, across the game, including players, coaches, referees, volunteers and committees.

As Minister for Sport in the north, I fully support the aspirations of the IRFU to grow women's Rugby here through the Ulster Branch on the basis of the 'Women in Rugby Action Plan 2018-2023.'

The current 'Sport Matters' Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation provides the strategic context for growth in female sport. As a result, my Department, through Sport NI, has provided both financial and practical support to the sports sector to grow female participation in sport, including Rugby.

Work on the development of a new 10 year strategy has commenced and the increase in participation of all under-represented groups, including women and girls, will continue to be a priority going forward.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Communities what actions her Department took to grow women's rugby following the Women's Rugby World Cup matches at Kingspan Stadium in 2017.
(AQW 2137/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Increasing female participation in sport and physical activity is a target in the Sport Matters Strategy and a priority for my Department. As a result, my Department and Sport NI have provided both financial and practical support to the sector to grow female participation in sport, including rugby.

The Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union (UBIRFU) is a founding member of the Female Sports Forum and helped to develop the Women in Sport Strategy: 'Active, Fit & Sporty'.

To support the delivery of Active, Fit & Sporty and to build on the legacy of hosting the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2017, the UBIRFU received nearly £68,000 from the Department and Sport NI to increase opportunities for women and girls to get involved in rugby. The funding has helped to ensure women and girls are supported to adopt and sustain a sporting lifestyle, to increase female participation in rugby and to enable clubs to deliver quality experiences for women and girls.

Through their Sporting Clubs Programme 2017-21, Sport NI has invested in three posts within UBIRFU including a Female Rugby Coordinator. The Female Rugby Coordinator is a new position within the organisation and plays an important role in growing women's rugby and in the implementation of the IRFU Women in Rugby Action Plan 2018-2023.

The growth in women and girl's rugby has also benefited from funding UBIRFU has received through the Department's Volunteering Innovation Fund. That funding totals nearly £88k since 2017.

Finally, Sport NI awarded the UBIRFU funding of £2,000 in 2016/17 and £3,600 in 2017/18 for a programme which aimed to address some of the barriers associated with increasing the number of female coaches.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in each constituency that do not have cavity wall insulation.
(AQW 2139/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has a portfolio of dwellings which cover a varied range of construction types, a proportion of which cannot have cavity wall insulation. The table below sets out the number of such properties by constituency.

In regard to properties of cavity wall construction, the Housing Executive began installing cavity wall insulation as part of the construction of new dwellings in the 1980s. An extensive retrofit programme began in the mid/late 1980s to install cavity wall insulation in those older properties that had not had it installed at the time of their construction.

However, while Housing Executive is confident that few of its cavity wall constructed properties do not have cavity wall insulation, these installations would not have been recorded on an electronic database at that time and therefore records are incomplete on this issue. The Housing Executive is, therefore, unable to confirm how many, if any, cavity wall constructed properties in each constituency do not have cavity wall insulation.

Constituency	Total
Belfast East	1055
Belfast North	2287
Belfast South	1256
Belfast West	2162
East Antrim	704
East Londonderry	649
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	372
Foyle	1244
Lagan Valley	900
Mid Ulster	210
Newry and Armagh	271
North Antrim	658
North Down	453
South Antrim	713
South Down	161
Strangford	376
Upper Bann	915
West Tyrone	788

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities to detail her Department's expenditure on the Ulster Grand Prix for the last five years.

(AQW 2140/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Department has, through SportNI, supported measures to improve access and safety at the Ulster Grand Prix paddock and circuit at Dundrod.

Sport NI provided funding totalling £262,718 in 2017 to Dundrod and District Motorcycle Club, who promote the Ulster Grand Prix. The funding was used to improve safety provision and included the provision of a replacement motorbike scrutiny building which included modern toilet and shower facilities for competitors, improvements to the race administration building and paddock and improved disabled access.

£24,995 of the funding allocated was used to purchase safety bales to improve safety provision for riders and spectators. The bales are not exclusively for use at the Ulster Grand Prix and are loaned to other road racing events when schedules permit.

Ms Mullan asked the Minister for Communities whether supplementary payments will continue after 31 March 2020 for people who are worse off after transitioning from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment.

(AQW 2163/17-22)

Ms Hargey: As agreed in New Decade, New Approach, I am committed to extending all of the existing welfare mitigation measures, including those for people who are worse off after moving from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment.

Officials are currently drafting the necessary legislation to extend the existing mitigation schemes beyond 31 March 2020. The draft Regulations will be laid before the Assembly for consideration in the coming weeks.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Communities to outline her plans to ensure the sustainability and growth of Carrickfergus Castle as a heritage and tourism attraction.

(AQW 2169/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Carrickfergus Castle is one of our best-known State Care Monuments and in recent years has attracted around 75,000 visitors each year.

My Department has recently completed the first phase of planned developments at the castle, with the replacement of the flat roof of the Great Keep with a new Irish oak roof constructed using medieval building techniques, in a £1 million conservation project.

Phase 2 of works will address the east sea tower and grand battery, including other associated conservation works at the site, and I hope – subject to budget confirmation – to allocate significant resources in 2020-21 to undertake the necessary works.

These two phases of work connect to the plans within the Belfast Region City Deal to provide around £38 million of investment for heritage-led regeneration of the town of Carrickfergus. The development of these plans is being led jointly by my Department and Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, working with Tourism Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure, Translink and other stakeholders. The developing plans address a number of areas of the town, including the town walls and the castle. The works aim to develop the Castle, Walls and surrounding environment as a world class heritage site and visitor attraction, with high quality public realm works enhancing the Castle setting, facilitating access to the town centre and creating a venue for both residents and visitors. The combined interventions are being designed to regenerate, reposition and rebrand the town of Carrickfergus, placing it firmly on the map as an authentic heritage-led tourism hub, part of the wider Belfast Story and the 'must visit' starting point to the Causeway Coastal Route.

While this ambitious longer-term plans are being developed, my Department continues to work closely with Mid & East Antrim Borough Council to open the castle to the public and explain its historical importance as part of the wider tourism and heritage offering in the town and surrounding area.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the implementation of the Disability Employment Strategy. (AQW 2178/17-22)

Ms Hargey: My Department is fully committed to supporting people with disabilities and health conditions progress towards, move into and stay in employment, and does this through a number of programmes.

The current Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is a five year strategy which will run until March 2021 in which my Department has a clear lead responsibility for the implementation.

Some key achievements my Department has made to date within the strategy include:

Under Theme One 'empowering people to secure paid employment':

- established a Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum. This forum was established in 2016 and has brought together key officials, along with representatives from the disability sector to monitor and positively influence the implementation of the strategy,
- from April 2019 to January 2020 supported 3421 people through our disability employment programmes and supported 38 of these into employment.

Under Theme Two, 'job retention and career development':

- from April 2019 to January 2020 my Department supported 2419 people to retain employment;
- Workable Programme eligibility has been reduced from 16 hours to 10 hours to allow more people to access the Programme;
- Access to Work and Workable participants can also participate on the Condition Management Programme to help them stay in work; and
- The Condition Management Programme has been extended to all Universal Credit regimes and Steps 2 Success participants.

Under Theme Three, 'working with employers':

- 'Employing People with Disabilities – a positive action guide for employers' was launched in January 2019.

Work will continue alongside our partners in the disability sector to ensure we offer the support required for people with disabilities and health conditions to progress towards and remain in employment.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister for Communities whether she will take steps to introduce the New Enterprise Allowance as it is in the rest of the UK.

(AQW 2183/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The introduction of Universal Credit altered the approach in respect of benefits for people in self-employment. Newly self-employed people on Universal Credit may receive a 'start-up period' of up to one year where they will continue to receive Universal Credit payments based on their circumstances. Within the start-up period people will –

- receive UC based on their actual earnings
- not be subject to job search requirements
- attend 4 quarterly meetings with a Work Coach to check they are still gainfully self-employed and taking steps to increase their earnings.

During this period Universal Credit payments will only be subject to a tapered earnings deduction if the business is profitable, taking any previous losses into account.

Work Coaches based in the network of 35 Jobs and Benefits Offices will support and encourage people who are interested in self-employment to take steps to explore the viability of their business idea. Work coaches have access to external sources

of advice and support for self-employed people. They will actively support and signpost individuals to online resources, Local Councils and Enterprise Agencies to provide expert business advice and assist them to develop their business.

My Department is currently considering a range of options in respect of self-employment and how best to further assist people in this category, this will include assessing the viability of support equivalent to that which is available in Britain. All options will be assessed for affordability considering current budgetary constraints. In the meantime, there is a range of support for people planning to set up their own business or considering self-employment. Useful information on starting up your own business and the support available can be found on nidirect (see link below).

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/starting-your-own-business>

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the level of child poverty, broken down by constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2197/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Official measures of Child Poverty are derived from the annual Family Resources Survey.

The Department is unable to report on Child Poverty at the constituency level due to the high levels of uncertainty surrounding estimates at constituency level.

The table below details the number and percentage of children living in poverty for each of the last five years:

Number and percentage of children living in relative poverty (before housing costs)

	Financial Year				
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of Children	101,000	109,000	93,000	99,000	85,000
Percentage	22	25	21	22	19

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of applicants on the housing waiting list for Rathcoole.

(AQW 2216/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has advised that there were 402 applicants on the waiting list for Rathcoole as at December 2019.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline the business case presented by the Housing Executive to his Department on the future of (i) Monkscoole House; and (ii) Abbotscoole House; and what engagement Housing Executive and departmental officials have had with stakeholders and residents regarding the future of these tower blocks.

(AQW 2220/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive business case recommending the demolition of Monkscoole House was approved by the Housing Executive Board on 27th November 2019 before being submitted to the Department for Communities on 4th December 2019. The business case takes the form of the 10 step appraisal set out in the Department of Finance's Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation and, therefore, assesses a range of potential options against a range of objectives and factors in arriving at the recommended option of redevelopment.

In line with the Tower Blocks Action Plan that was approved by the Housing Executive Board in March 2019 and the Department in August 2019, the proposal is to demolish both Monkscoole House and Abbotscoole House and build new social housing on the combined cleared site.

The separate business case for Abbotscoole House has not yet been prepared or presented to either the Housing Executive Board or the Department.

In respect of engagement with stakeholders and residents, in June 2018 a News Release and a letter was issued to each resident advising of the future of the tower blocks and that the Housing Executive would be consulting with the residents of the blocks, which included Monkscoole and Abbotscoole.

The letter also advised the residents that due to the cost of investing in our multi-storeys, it was believed that any money invested should be in the replacement of these tower blocks.

The Housing Executive invited local Councillors to briefing sessions on Housing Executive proposals for all tower blocks on both the 19th June and 28th of June 2018. Departmental Officials were in attendance at both sessions.

In September 2018 a letter was issued to each resident advising that consultation would begin door to door and this was completed by December 2018. The Housing Executive advised the residents of the results in March 2019. The results from this consultation exercise were as follows:

- Abbotscoole had an overall response rate of 84%, with 26% in favour of demolition and 74% against.
- Monkscoole had an overall response rate of 80%, with 75% in favour of demolition and 25% against the proposals.

The Housing Executive gave a presentation on the Tower Block Strategy to the Antrim and Newtownabbey Planning Committee on 25th October 2018.

The Housing Executive Board approved the demolition proposal for both blocks in March 2019 and residents were notified of this decision in May 2019.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Communities whether the Chairperson of the Historical Monuments Council wrote to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure on 30 October 2017 requesting that planning permission for a wind turbine at Knock Iveagh be revoked; and, if so, whether she will make that letter public.

(AQW 2259/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I can confirm that the Chair of the Historic Monuments Council wrote to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure on 30 October 2017. I have placed a copy of the letter in the Assembly Library.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities whether she has plans to legislate to address problem gambling.

(AQW 2273/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I recognise that the current legislation on gambling is outdated; it has not kept pace with industry and technological changes and does not contain adequate protections for vulnerable people.

A consultation on the "Regulation of Gambling" was launched on 16 December 2019 and closed on 21 February 2020. The purpose of the consultation is to seek views on the appropriateness of the current law and to identify areas of gambling activity which should be included in any future legislation. My officials will analyse the responses received and I will consider next steps.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities what plans she has for further social housing development schemes in each of the next four financial years; and what will be the location of these proposed social housing developments.

(AQW 2437/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am currently considering the detailed plans for the 2020/21-2022/23 Social Housing Development Programme that have been submitted to me by the Housing Executive. Delivery of these plans will be significantly determined by future decisions on budget.

New Decade, New Approach, committed the Executive to "enhance investment in new social and affordable home starts". In 19/20, £146m has been invested against a target of 1850 starts.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the long-term future trajectory of Northern Ireland Housing Executive rent increases, broken down by (a) year; and (b) percentage increase; and (ii) when rent increases will end.

(AQW 2531/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The New Decade New Approach document outlines that my Department will "set a long-term trajectory for the rental charges for Housing Executive homes which is sustainable and is affordable to tenants."

My officials will develop a policy to allow the implementation of a long-term trajectory for rental charges for Housing Executive homes which will reflect the stated aims of the New Decade New Approach document. Once this policy is developed I will be in a position to provide more detail.

Department of Education

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what proposals and budget he has to support young carers aged 16 to 18, who are unable to access support available to adult carers.

(AQW 2050/17-22)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): My Department does not have a budget to support young carers aged 16 to 18 who are unable to access support available to adult carers.

The Department for Communities has confirmed that young carers may be eligible for support through the social security system administered by the Department for Communities. Carer's Allowance is a non-contributory benefit available to people aged 16 and over who provide substantial care, of at least 35 hours a week, to a severely disabled person who is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance care component (highest or middle rate), Armed Forces Independence Payment, Personal Independence Payment (daily living component), Attendance Allowance or Constant Attendance Allowance at the appropriate rate.

To qualify for Carer's Allowance a person must not be in full-time education. It is a general rule in social security that benefits are not available to students, except in very limited circumstances, because there is a system of student grants and loans to help with support.

Those carers who can undertake some paid employment in addition to their caring responsibilities can earn up to £123 per week without losing entitlement to the benefit.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 686/17-22, when his Department will produce a formal response to the public consultation on deferring entry to compulsory education carried out in 2014/15; and for his assessment of the current systems providing for deferred entry to compulsory education currently operating in the English, Scottish and Welsh jurisdictions.

(AQW 2131/17-22)

Mr Weir: A summary of the responses to the consultation commissioned by the previous Minister has been published and is available on the Department's website. You will be aware that, at that time, the decision was made not to proceed with legislation on deferring entry to compulsory education in exceptional circumstances. As the consultation is now over five years old, I am not persuaded that it forms the basis on which to move the debate forward.

I am aware that practice varies in other jurisdictions where the ultimate decision still lies with the appropriate authorities rather than individual parents. I am also mindful that there is evidence on both sides of the argument for taking a different approach here and I am meeting the member to explore the issue further. However, given the number of urgent issues currently impacting on education such as school funding, special educational needs and education underachievement, I have not come to a view as to whether legislative change would be a priority for the Executive's legislative programme during the remainder of the current Assembly mandate.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education (i) how many escorts are used to help children with special educational needs or disabilities get to school; and (ii) what guidelines are given to escorts to ensure children access and leave vehicles safely.

(AQW 2204/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that it currently employs 513 escorts to assist with home to school transport for pupils with special educational needs or medical needs. All Education Authority employed escorts are issued with an Escorts Instruction Manual and receive additional instruction and training as deemed necessary to meet the specific needs of pupils under their supervision.

All home to school bus drivers employed by the EA must hold a D Licence, Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) card, Digital Tachograph Card and Access NI Certificate before taking up their position. Drivers of private operator buses and taxis contracted by the Education Authority to assist with home to school transport services are required to provide evidence of a D Licence (or D1 for minibuses), hold a CPC card and have a current Access NI certificate. Such evidence is to be provided to the EA prior to commencement of the contract and with updated copies provided throughout the duration of their contract.

When in employment drivers receive regular CPC training and Passenger Assisted Training Scheme Training. Additional training on special educational needs or medical needs is provided as necessary to meet the needs of the pupils being transported.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made, since the beginning of the 2016/17 financial year, to arrangements for mileage allowance paid to parents or guardians of children attending special schools, who choose to transport their children to school themselves.

(AQW 2205/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that since the beginning of the 2016/17 financial year, no changes have been made to the arrangements for payments for home to school transport assistance made by the Education Authority to parents of children attending special schools.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education to outline what training and access checks drivers of school transport are required to undertake before taking up their position.

(AQW 2206/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that it currently employs 513 escorts to assist with home to school transport for pupils with special educational needs or medical needs. All Education Authority employed escorts are issued with an Escorts Instruction Manual and receive additional instruction and training as deemed necessary to meet the specific needs of pupils under their supervision.

All home to school bus drivers employed by the EA must hold a D Licence, Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) card, Digital Tachograph Card and Access NI Certificate before taking up their position. Drivers of private operator buses and taxis contracted by the Education Authority to assist with home to school transport services are required to provide evidence of a D Licence (or D1 for minibuses), hold a CPC card and have a current Access NI certificate. Such evidence is to be provided to the EA prior to commencement of the contract and with updated copies provided throughout the duration of their contract.

When in employment drivers receive regular CPC training and Passenger Assisted Training Scheme Training. Additional training on special educational needs or medical needs is provided as necessary to meet the needs of the pupils being transported.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what proposals his Department has to improve workforce planning to ensure a sufficient number of Children's Welfare Officers are in post.

(AQW 2207/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority routinely monitors the number of staff in the Education Welfare Service and makes planned adjustments on the basis of assessed need and geographical areas.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what is the respective cost to the departmental budget of each of the sectoral support bodies.

(AQW 2289/17-22)

Mr Weir: The amount of funding provided to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) for 2019-20 is as follows:

CnaG	Recurrent	£634,000
	Capital	£3,000
	Total	£637,000
NICIE	Recurrent	£613,000
	Capital	£4,000
	Total	£617,000
CSSC	Recurrent	£983,000
	Total	£983,000

In 2019/20 the Department is providing initial funding of £3.13m recurrent and £15k capital to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). However, the greater part of the Council's budget is spent not on sectoral support functions but on executive functions conferred on CCMS by the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, i.e. employing teachers; co-ordinating the planning of the effective provision of schools; and promoting the effective management and control of schools by Boards of Governors.

The Department also provides limited grant assistance of £98,000 p.a. each to two other sectoral bodies, the Governing Bodies Association and the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service, principally to help professionalise their respective sectors' engagement in area planning.

Budgets beyond this current financial year are not yet known, therefore no decisions have been taken in relation to future years.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education (i) how many classroom assistants are employed by the Education Authority; (ii) how many are employed by schools; and (iii) how much, on average, is a classroom assistant paid per annum.

(AQW 2357/17-22)

Mr Weir:

- (i) The number of classroom assistants employed by the Education Authority is 9,472
- (ii) The number of classroom assistants employed by schools is 4,110.
- (iii) The Education Authority has advised that it is not possible to provide an average salary figure given the amount of variables involved. However, please note that the National Joint Council Pay scales (wef 01/04/2019) for classroom assistants employed by the Education Authority range from Point 1 - £17,364 to Point 17 - £23,836.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to allocate additional resources to Inner City South Belfast Sure Start, in order to take account of the changing demographics in the South Belfast constituency, with regard to the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

(AQW 2362/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Sure Start Programme is funded by the Department of Education (DE) and administered on behalf of the Department by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). The Programme is delivered by 38 Sure Start projects across Northern Ireland.

I am aware of the excellent work done by a number of Sure Start projects, including South Belfast Sure Start (SBSS), in delivering a range of targeted programmes to ensure that refugees and asylum seeking families are offered appropriate support. I am advised that in addition to Sure Start funding SBSS has also benefited from funding from the "Wrap-Around" Educational Support Pilot Programme in 2019/20 which is helping to support ROMA families in the area.

I acknowledge that demographics in South Belfast have changed over time and my Department continues to liaise closely with HSCB concerning impact on delivery of Sure Start in the area. I am also conscious that we need to review our targeted

Early Years interventions (including Sure Start) to ensure they continue to reach those most in need, within the budgets available. This is something my officials will be taking forward over the coming year. Budgets beyond this financial year are not yet known therefore no decisions have been taken in relation to future years.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in the East Londonderry constituency waiting for a statement of educational needs.

(AQW 2371/17-22)

Mr Weir: This has been interpreted as the number of referrals to the Education Authority for a statutory assessment (a statutory assessment may result in a statement or a note in lieu of a statement).

The number of children in the East Londonderry constituency who are currently undergoing a statutory assessment is 68.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to detail the capita per child, for primary and post-primary, in the (i) maintained sector; (ii) controlled sector; (iii) Irish sector; and (iv) faith-based sector.

(AQW 2406/17-22)

Mr Weir: The funding per pupil in 2019-20, distributed through the Common Funding Formula (CFF) only, for the primary and post-primary phases in the (i) maintained; (ii) controlled; and (iii) Irish-medium sectors, are reflected in the table below.

2019-20 Per Pupil Funding through the CFF*

Sector	Phase	£
Maintained	Primary ⁽³⁾	3,137
	Post-Primary	4,646
Controlled ⁽¹⁾	Primary ⁽³⁾	3,051
	Post-Primary	4,428
Irish-medium ⁽²⁾	Primary ⁽³⁾	3,507
	Post-Primary	5,344

* Data source: CFF 2019-20, which included funding to mitigate the increase in Teachers' Employer's Superannuation costs effective from 1 April 2019.

- (1) Controlled integrated schools are included in the Controlled sector above.
- (2) Controlled and maintained Irish-medium schools are included in the Irish-medium sector above.
- (3) Nursery units in primary schools are included in the primary phase above.

This excludes special schools as these schools are not funded through the CFF, and voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools, as these schools are designated as separate sectors.

Faith schools, i.e. independent Christian schools, are not funded by the Department of Education.

The Department is unable to disaggregate all funding on a per pupil basis.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children who are homeschooled, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 2407/17-22)

Mr Weir: As of 17 February 2020 there were 428 children and young people who were known to the Education Authority (EA) as being electively home educated. It is important to note that this is not the total number of children electively home educated in Northern Ireland, rather it is only those that the EA has been informed about through the de-registration process or because EA has been asked for advice and support.

The actual number may be higher as parents are only required to notify the EA if their child has previously attended school or has a statement of special educational needs.

Parents may choose what they consider to be the most appropriate educational setting for their child and that can include being home schooled.

The EA does not record the data by constituency and therefore can only provide a total figure.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual cost of sessional passes out of the home to school transport budget for eligible pupils travelling from Larne town to St Killian's College, Carnlough.

(AQW 2428/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has confirmed that the cost of sessional passes for pupils with an address in Larne travelling to St Killian's College as £145,453 for the 2019/20 academic year.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19810/11-15, to detail the value of the capital investments in new build primary schools from 2013/14 to present, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 2429/17-22)

Mr Weir:

Constituency	£'m
Belfast East	1.5
Belfast North	3.0
Belfast South	0.2
Belfast West	1.9
East Antrim	8.0
East Londonderry	1.6
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0.5
Lagan Valley	0.4
Mid Ulster	0.7
Newry & Armagh	0.5
North Antrim	5.4
North Down	0.2
South Antrim	0.1
South Down	5.0
Strangford	4.0
Upper Bann	0.3
West Tyrone	10.3
Total Capital Investment	43.5

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education for an update on development proposals for a 52 Place Nursery Unit and an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Centre and Learning Support Centre (LSC) at Forge Integrated Primary School.
(AQO 196/17-22)

Mr Weir: Development Proposals (DP464) to establish a 52 place part-time Nursery Unit at Forge Integrated Primary School and (DP 465) to establish an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Centre and Learning Support Centre (LSC) at Forge Integrated Primary School were approved by my Department on 9 April 2019.

Both of these Development Proposals (DP464 and DP465) were subject to approval of DP463, to relocate Forge Integrated Primary School to the former Knockbreda High School site, which was approved on 16 April 2018. DP464 and DP465 are both conditional on the relocation of the school and cannot be implemented at the existing site.

A major capital project to implement DP463, DP464 and DP465 is currently underway.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1787/17-22, to outline why submission of a planning application for a new build at Islandmagee is being delayed until summer 2020.
(AQW 2546/17-22)

Mr Weir: The planning application can only be submitted once the Department considers and approves the concept design of the school, which is to be submitted by the Integrated Consultancy Team.

Lodgement of the planning application in summer 2020 aligns with the current programme for this project.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how many school inspectors are (i) male; and (ii) female.
(AQW 2547/17-22)

Mr Weir: The number of inspectors at 3 February 2020 who are (i) male, and (ii) female is set out below.

	Female	Male
Education and Training Inspectorate	30	19

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of school inspectors for the past five years, broken down by year.

(AQW 2548/17-22)

Mr Weir: The table below outlines the cost of the inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate for the past five years, by financial year.

Year	Total cost
2014/15	£ 4,864,165
2015/16	£ 4,758,941
2016/17	£ 4,311,380
2017/18	£ 4,487,158
2018/19	£ 4,515,402

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how many school inspections have been carried out in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools, in the past five years, broken down by year.

(AQW 2549/17-22)

Mr Weir: The table below states the number of school inspections in primary and post-primary schools in the past five years, by academic year.

Phase	Insp Type	2014 / 2015	2015 / 2016	2016 / 2017	2017 / 2018	2018 / 2019	Grand Total
Primary	INSP	97	122	94	91	97	501
	FUI	32	11	22	34	14	113
	SII			83	116	121	320
	MIN			52	4	2	58
	BMIN			1	3		4
Total		129	133	252	248	234	996

Phase	Insp Type	2014 / 2015	2015 / 2016	2016 / 2017	2017 / 2018	2018 / 2019	Grand Total
Post-Primary	INSP	26	23	20	24	19	112
	FUI	15	13	12	14	4	58
	SII			11	30	30	71
	MIN			9			9
	BMIN			3	1	3	7
Post Total		41	36	55	69	56	257

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how many school inspectors are employed by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 2550/17-22)

Mr Weir: There were 49 inspectors employed by the Education and Training Inspectorate at 3 February 2020.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) teachers; and (ii) school support staff made redundant in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2579/17-22)

Mr Weir: The number of teachers and school support staff who left via a voluntary redundancy scheme in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below.

Teaching Staff Leaving Through Voluntary Exit Scheme

	No. of Staff	FTE ² of Posts
2017/18	155	148.7
2018/19	170	159.8
2019/20	97	92
Total	422	400.50

School Support Staff Leaving Through Voluntary Exit Scheme

	No. of Staff	FTE ² of Posts
2017/18	200	142.62
2018/19	273	190.57
2019/20 ¹	248	134.72
Total	721	467.91

1 Figures for 2019/20 are forecasts based on approved applications to date.

2 Full-Time Equivalent posts

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Education to clarify whether the Education Authority will accept a private educational psychology report in relation to special educational needs.

(AQW 2583/17-22)

Mr Weir: Regulation 9 of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 provides that psychological advice shall be sought by the Education Authority (EA) from a person regularly employed or engaged by the EA as an educational psychologist.

While the EA will take account of private educational psychology reports, these reports cannot be used instead of advice provided by the educational psychologist employed or engaged by the EA.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to outline what schools in North Down are to have capital works carried out under the School Enhancement Programme.

(AQW 2626/17-22)

Mr Weir: In January 2019 St Columbanus' College was announced under the second tranche from the School Enhancement Programme Second Call (SEP2) to advance in design.

In January 2020, I announced three schools from the North Down constituency under the third tranche of projects to advance in design under SEP2:

- Glenraig Controlled Integrated Primary School
- Kilcooley Primary School
- Sullivan Upper School, Holywood

Officials will work with the announced schools to agree the scope of the projects. Detailed plans for each school will be developed throughout the planning and design process. It is therefore not possible to be definitive about the timescale or likely spend on any individual project until the scoping/feasibility work is complete. However, SEP projects typically result in investment of between £2.5 and £4 million.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to ensure that all 1,400 Controlled post-primary school children in Lurgan have access to an educational pathway within their own town.

(AQW 2651/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has a statutory duty to promote and co-ordinate the planning of the effective provision of Controlled schools. It is, therefore, the responsibility of EA, in the first instance, to determine the appropriate Controlled school structure for children in the Lurgan area.

If the EA, as the planning authority of the Controlled sector, decides that a significant change to Controlled post-primary provision is required in the best educational interests of children, there is a statutory process which must be followed which involves bringing forward development proposals, having taken account of the wider area context.

My Department will only become formally engaged should any development proposals be published.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education whether GAA sports are (i) part of the physical education curriculum; or (ii) have facilities and equipment necessary to play the sport, at any controlled or integrated schools.
(AQW 2656/17-22)

Mr Weir: My Department does not prescribe what sports or games should be taught within a school's Physical Education (PE) curriculum. Subject to meeting the minimum requirements for PE provision, it is a matter for schools to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils and to decide how it is delivered and the resources used.

The provision of sports facilities including pitches and posts should be agreed between the managing authority and the school. The provision of sports equipment is the responsibility of individual schools.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 224/17-22, (i) has the Education Authority had any public bodies express an interest in the site; and (ii) to provide details of their names.
(AQW 2657/17-22)

Mr Weir: Strabane Academy continues to use the site on Liskey Road for PE and sport and will do so for some time as the pitches at the new site are constructed and then lie fallow until they are playable. As such, the EA has not yet declared the Liskey Road site vacant and has not initiated the public sector tawl to determine if there is any interest in acquiring the site in due course.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to outline what plans his Department has for a workforce strategy for the Irish-medium sector.
(AQW 2682/17-22)

Mr Weir: It is the responsibility of each employing authority to monitor and manage their workforce. An employing authority can be the Education Authority, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, or the Board of Governors of an individual school depending on its management type.

Ms Rogan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new school for Down High School in Downpatrick.
(AQW 2687/17-22)

Mr Weir: The major capital investment project to provide a new school build for Down High School is well underway. The appointed Integrated Consultant Team (ICT), McAdam Design, have produced a full RIBA Stage 4 technical design which is currently under consideration. Planning permission is in place and enabling works are being undertaken at the site on Strangford Road.

A pre-qualification process has been undertaken to appoint a contractor and tender information will issue to the approved list of competitors in the coming months with a view to commencing the new build in the autumn.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the development of the Strule Shared Education Campus, for an indicative timeline for the following milestones (i) the procurement process from the beginning until completion; (ii) invitations to tender; (iii) the timescale for the tender process including a prequalification questionnaire if required; (iv) the timescale for completion and receipt of tenders; (v) the time permitted for review of tender(s); (vi) the allocation of the tender – how long after receipt is this decision made; (vii) any time contingencies built in, for e.g. appeal, legal challenge, time permitted for a potential review/appeal; (viii) award of contract, including time allowed between award of contract and construction to begin; (ix) the timescale for construction including from start of build to handover of the buildings and the sports grounds; and (x) detail of any time contingencies built in for e.g. inclement weather.
(AQW 2825/17-22)

Mr Weir: The next stage of construction has been delayed due to tendering issues and the need for business case re-approval. My Department has completed a fundamental review of the construction programme, and I am giving this my urgent consideration.

My Department is working diligently to move the Strule Programme forward. The tender competition to appoint a contractor is suspended, but remains live. Decisions regarding the tender competition will follow my consideration of the business case. It would be inappropriate to comment further on the procurement process due to commercial sensitivity.

At this stage provisional opening of the Campus is planned for September 2024 at the earliest. This is dependent on works commencing on site by May 2021 at the latest.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education whether there have been instances of sectarianism reported in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools over the last three years.
(AQW 2830/17-22)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education does not collect information on instances of sectarianism.

Department of Finance

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of vacant domestic properties, based on rating records, in the (i) Mid and East Antrim Council; and (ii) Causeway Coast and Glens Council areas.

(AQW 1891/17-22)

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): A total of:

- (i) 1,340 domestic properties in the Mid and East Antrim District Council; and
- (ii) 1,806 domestic properties in the Causeway Coast and Glens District Council

were recorded as vacant as at 31st January 2020.

Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes legislation on 1st October 2011, the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant, nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance what guarantees he can give on funding for the Condition Management Programme led by healthcare professionals.

(AQW 1981/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department is fully committed to supporting people with disabilities and health conditions progress towards, move into and stay in employment, and does this through a number of programmes.

These include the Condition Management Programme which is funded by my Department and delivered by Health Care professionals in the five Health & Social Care Trusts. The current funding approvals are due to expire at the end of March 2020. A Business Case has been developed which will progress through the required departmental governance process later this month.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance whether his Department has any plans to purchase Kinnegar barracks, Holywood.

(AQW 2006/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department has no plans to purchase the site at Kinnegar barracks, Holywood.

I understand that Ards & North Down Council is currently engaging with the site owner, the Ministry of Defence, on future plans for the site.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance whether he will remove, from the 2021 census, the question asking those who have responded that they do not belong to any religion, what religious community background they may be perceived as from.

(AQW 2020/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The last two Censuses (2001 & 2011) included two religion questions. The first question asked everyone the "religion they belonged to" and the second question asked those who had no current religion the "religion they were brought up in".

The statistics produced from these questions are used by public and private sector bodies to meet their statutory obligations under section 75 of the NI Act (1998) and the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

A public consultation on the 2021 Census revealed continuing strong support for the two religion questions. This included support from the Equality Commission. The questions were tested in the recent census rehearsal and continue to perform well. Therefore, I am in favour of retaining the two religion questions from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses in the 2021 Census. The legislation required to take forward the 2021 Census will now be considered by the Executive Committee.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Finance whether all increased expenditure on public service pensions as a result of the McCloud judgement will be met through AMI funding and not from the Block Grant.

(AQW 2022/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Pensions in payment are paid through AME. Any increased expenditure on public service pensions, as a result of decisions to be taken in relation to the McCloud ruling, would be expected to materialise over future decades as current public sector workers retire and their pensions start to be paid.

Employer contribution rates, paid from Departmental budgets, are set in future valuations of schemes. The next valuation will set rates from 2023. It is too early to say whether employer contribution rates will increase from 2023 as a number of factors could affect the valuations between now and then.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Finance (i) how many cases have been handled under the Civil Service Injury Benefit Scheme in each of the last three years; (ii) what are the associated costs to claimants who have suffered from an injury at work; and (iii) to list the common causes and types of injuries during this period.

(AQW 2028/17-22)

Mr Murphy:

Financial Years	Temporary Injury applications	Costs to claimants	Permanent Injury applications	Permanent Injury awards In payment	Common causes and types of injuries
2017/2018	78	Nil for all types of injury awards	52	204*	PTSD, other Psychological/ Mental Health;
2018/2019	100		60	244	
2019/2020	74		58	269	Physical injuries including musculoskeletal

*All Perm injuries in payment not restricted to 3 years listed.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance how members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service are supported in familiarising themselves, understanding and accessing up to date workplace policies.

(AQW 2035/17-22)

Mr Murphy: All NICS HR policies are contained in the NICS Handbook with which line managers in all departments should be familiar. The Civil Service provides direct employee access to workplace policies through the Employee Services and the People Management portal icons on their desktop computer and / or laptop. NICS staff can search for up to date policy documents with supporting guidance.

Where a member of staff does not have direct access to a computer their line manager can provide information on NICS policies and procedures. Staff can also contact NICS HR and HR Connect to seek support and advice in their understanding of an HR policy/process and line managers can provide their officers with the necessary contact details. Staff who are a member of a recognised trade union can also seek information from their representatives.

Caseworkers in Employee Relations (NICS HR) ensure staff with whom they come in contact know and understand how policies such as absence management, discipline, performance management and Dignity at Work operate. Welfare Officers provide advice and support to officers as part of the Welfare Service provided by the NICS; they also provide copies of policies and processes to officers. I would further advise Employee Relations is working closely with end users, and the Behavioural Science Unit (Department of Finance) to ensure policy and process matters are both user friendly and fully accessible for all staff.

The NICS HR Learning and Development (L&D) team provides further support in HR policy areas through training services. These training interventions are developed and maintained with the policy area and delivered through a mixture of face to face training and digital learning. Where an officer does not have access to a computer then line management provides information on what is available. Line managers complete mandatory training in such areas as performance management, and sickness absence management, so are well placed to inform their teams on key HR policies and processes.

NICS HR Resourcing policies are contained within the HR Handbook. Relevant policies or terms are highlighted in individual external and internal recruitment exercises and links are provided on the NICS recruitment website and in the Weekly Opportunities Bulletins (WOB) issued to all staff. Hard copies of the WOB and resourcing policies can be provided, on request.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance what percentage of businesses provided data requested by Land and Property Services to determine the Net Annual Value of their business property for Reval 2020.

(AQW 2036/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In April 2019 Land & Property Services (LPS) wrote to 44,487 occupiers of business properties seeking information on rent, lease and trading information. LPS followed up with reminders to those that did not respond. LPS did not write to property which is generally not available to rent, such as churches, schools, hospitals or universities. Vacant property was also excluded.

LPS received 20,600 responses, a return rate of 46%. Since publishing the draft schedule of values on 7 January LPS has received a further 23 responses.

LPS will undertake a review of the arrangements to gather evidence to inform the revised Net Annual Values for Reval2020 with a view to exploring what may be done as part of the next non-domestic revaluation to improve the rate of returns from all classes of business.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance whether he has engaged with Westminster officials on regulating the insurance industry in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2042/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The regulation of the insurance industry is a Reserved Matter where responsibility lies with the relevant authorities in London who have a duty to ensure that the rights of policyholders are protected.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Finance to outline the timescale for the production of an updated Civil Service code.
(AQW 2070/17-22)

Mr Murphy: A revised NICS Code of Ethics will be brought to the Executive for consideration shortly, and will be implemented following consultation with the civil service trade unions.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Finance whether he will write to the Prime Minister asking him to outline timescales for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and how this will be allocated.
(AQW 2071/17-22)

Mr Murphy: My Department is in regular contact with MHCLG on this issue and has pressed for full details on its implementation plans on numerous occasions.

I have already written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury regarding timescales and allocations for this and other replacement EU funds.

I will continue to attempt to influence the development, allocations and delivery of this fund and others wherever I can, at both Ministerial level and through my departmental officials.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance how his Department is adopting a trauma-informed approach when developing policy and legislation.
(AQW 2122/17-22)

Mr Murphy: As outlined in the New Decade New Approach document DoF will apply the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement and co-design in the development and delivery its policy and legislation. In this way those who have experienced trauma and those with expertise in responding to trauma will be able to inform the development of relevant policies.

The Innovation Lab within DoF can provide expertise in customer engagement and user centred design to support departments in policy development.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the Dormant Accounts Fund.
(AQW 2196/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In September 2019, the Department of Finance, directed the National Lottery Community Fund, to establish a Dormant Accounts Scheme to distribute some £16 million currently available, to a range of organisations including community & voluntary groups and social enterprises, under the key themes of building capacity, resilience and sustainability.

The Lottery has consulted with stakeholders and will use the outcome of the consultation to inform a Strategic Plan which will be laid in the Assembly.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance whether he has made representations to Westminster officials concerning the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign.
(AQW 2198/17-22)

Mr Murphy: This is a matter within the responsibility of the Department for Communities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to specify and quantify the Consolidated Fund Extra Receipts surrendered to HM Treasury Consolidation Fund, in each of the last 3 years and in the current year to date.
(AQW 2210/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Over the past 3 years there have been no Consolidated Fund Extra Receipts surrendered to HM Treasury Consolidated Fund.

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance whether he will consider ensuring an independent review of recommendations arising from the review into Non-Domestic Rating System.
(AQW 2227/17-22)

Mr Murphy: As I advised the Member in my previous answer to AQW 447/17-22, my officials have been examining the broad and extensive range of independent responses from the Public Consultation on Business Rates in order to develop the options available to the Executive in terms of short, medium and long term policy objectives.

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance whether he will consider reviewing the model used to calculate Net Annual Values for the hospitality sector as part of Reval 2020.

(AQW 2228/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The statutory requirement on Land & Property Services (LPS) for Reval 2020 is to assess a Net Annual Value for all properties at 1 April 2018. All business rates are based on rental value. If the evidence of a rent isn't available, different methods are needed to determine the rental value.

In economic sectors where there is limited direct market rental evidence, the established methodology for assessing the rental value is the Receipts and Expenditure Method. This is used in the valuation of, for example, cinemas, markets, petrol filling stations, quarries, utilities, hotels and pubs. The Receipts and Expenditure methodology is the established approach for these kinds of businesses agreed between professional valuation bodies such as the RICS and government valuation bodies in England and Wales and Scotland, as well as here.

The Receipts and Expenditure Method of Valuation for Non-Domestic Rating is used by LPS to value pubs and hotels because anyone considering renting a pub or hotel would want to know how it is trading. That is why valuers call for accounts and evidence of turnover. There are no plans to review the use of this methodology for the hospitality sector.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance how much Financial Transactions Capital is available per annum for each Department to apply for; and how much each Department has (i) used; and (ii) returned, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2300/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The amount of Financial Transactions Capital DEL funding available to the NI Executive in each of the last three years has been £70.6 million in 2016-17; £166.9 million in 2017-18 and £182.2 million in 2018-19.

The departmental specific information you have requested for each of the last three years is shown in £millions below, in each case totals may not add due to rounding.

2016-17

Department	Published Budget	Reduced Requirements	Allocations	Spent
Communities	11.0	-	5.5	5.5
Economy	30.8	-0.6	-	20.5
Health	10.0	-9.3	-	0.8
Executive Office	6.0	-6.0	-	9.4
Unallocated Funding	12.8			
Total	70.6	-15.9	5.5	36.1

2017-18

Department	Published Budget	Reduced Requirements	Allocations	Spent
Economy	12.7	-2.3	-	9.4
Executive Office	101.8	-53.7	-	48.1
Unallocated Funding	52.5			
Total	166.9	-55.9	-	57.5

2018-19

Department	Published Budget	Reduced Requirements	Allocations	Spent
Communities	16.2	-16.2	-	-
Economy	40.4	-30.2	-	9.2
Executive Office	30.0	-30.1	1.3	1.1
Unallocated Funding	95.6			
Total	182.2	-76.6	1.3	10.4

It is disappointing that a significant amount of Financial Transactions Capital funding has not been drawn down. Going forward, I am keen to ensure a significant uptake in the use of this funding. My officials are liaising with the Strategic

Investment Board to examine the issues and I have asked that they also engage with other departments to identify additional ways in which this funding can be used.

Mr Blair asked the Minister of Finance what financial provision he plans to provide in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to address the climate and biodiversity crisis.

(AQW 2309/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The New Decade, New Approach document contains a number of initiatives to address the climate crisis. It is for the Ministers responsible to take forward those initiatives, as well as additional measures. The Executive will then consider these initiatives as part of the Budget process.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance to outline what mental health screening procedures are in place for prison officers and staff at the time of recruitment or during performance reviews.

(AQW 2368/17-22)

Mr Murphy: As part of the recruitment process applicants for the posts of Custody Prison Officer, Night Custody Officer and Prisoner Custody Officer are advised that the roles are both physically and psychologically challenging.

Candidates are required to complete health declarations and where they indicate they suffer from an existing medical condition they are required to include a medical report from their GP/Consultant indicating the nature of the condition and any likely impact on functional ability to work of the role.

Health screening and, where appropriate medical checks, is carried out by the Occupational Health Service for the NICS within the Department of Finance.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Finance how Northern Ireland's building regulation standards for energy efficiency compare with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 2415/17-22)

Mr Murphy: It is difficult to directly compare building regulations' energy efficiency requirements across the regions as each has different standards and there are many variations. Analysis depends, amongst other things, on the metrics and methodology used, the characteristics of relevant fuels and the building types. The Department does recognise that building regulations' energy efficiency requirements for new buildings are less onerous here and it is reviewing energy efficiency requirements in the context of developments in other administrations, with a view to uplifting standards as soon as is practicable.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Finance whether Northern Ireland's standards for insulation are lower than in other parts of the UK; and, if so, what action is being taken to harmonise and improve these standards in light of current climate change targets.

(AQW 2416/17-22)

Mr Murphy: It is not straightforward to extricate insulation requirements from the energy efficiency requirements of the building regulations as in all regions new buildings require a holistic assessment of the carbon performance of the building, balancing building fabric and building services efficiencies. The overall requirement under this assessment here is currently less onerous and provides greater flexibility on insulation, than in other regions.

Additional, minimum acceptable insulation standards for thermal elements (such as walls, floors and roofs) are in line with England's requirements.

In relation to work to existing buildings, insulation standards for work to thermal elements (whether new, replacement or renovated) are also in line with England.

Proposals will be coming forward from other regions, including from England's recent Future Homes Standard consultation on new build dwelling standards, in response to climate change targets and to implement the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. Proposals relating to buildings other than dwellings and for works to existing buildings are also awaited.

The Department is reviewing the energy efficiency and insulation requirements of our building regulations in this context with a view to providing new standards as soon as is practicable.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance when the 2019/20 business cases for each North-South body were approved; and how many have been approved to date.

(AQW 2445/17-22)

Mr Murphy: While North South Bodies will submit business cases for individual projects above delegated limits they do not provide business cases for financial years.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance to detail the percentage change in the Net Asset Value of each of the 302 churches and church halls in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council Area as a result of the Reval2020 Draft Schedule of Values.

(AQW 2453/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The changes for each of the 302 churches and church halls in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area is set out in the table attached at Annex A. The table includes the current NAV, the draft NAV and the % change. The overall change for these 302 churches and church halls is a reduction in the total NAV from £3.827m to £3.526m.

All properties listed in the Annex are exempt from payment of rates.

Annex A

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
494636		132	Ballyveely Road		£3,068	£3,037	1.0%
494635	Ballyweaney Presbyterian Church	130	Ballyveely Road		£23,954	£27,749	-13.7%
494589		34	Ballynaloob Road		£3,515	£5,582	-37.0%
564817	Allen Adair Memorial Hall	233	Castlecat Road		£3,088	£5,205	-40.7%
494182	Rasharkin Gospel Hall	40	Church Road		£1,836	£3,208	-42.8%
498029	Armoy Presbyterian Church		Drones Road	Armoy	£13,547	£9,833	37.8%
498105	St Olcan's RC Church	160	Glenshesk Road	Armoy	£5,225	£4,703	11.1%
504099	Drumtullagh Church (Col)	20	Lisnagat Road	Armoy	£5,225	£4,703	11.1%
497992		14	Church Road	Armoy	£8,425	£8,341	1.0%
498120	St Patrick's Church Hall (Col)	181	Glenshesk Road	Armoy	£5,100	£5,049	1.0%
498031	Gospel Hall	17	Drones Road	Armoy	£730	£730	0.0%
498127	St Olcan's Church Hall	200	Glenshesk Road	Armoy	£10,540	£16,740	-37.0%
379788	Representative Church Body	26	St. Pauls Road	Articlave	£4,175	£3,758	11.1%
379789	Representative Church Body	28	St. Pauls Road	Articlave	£5,925	£5,333	11.1%
379518	Articlave Lower Presbyterian Church	233	Mussenden Road	Articlave	£7,176	£6,831	5.1%
379775	First Dunboe Presbyterian Church	2	St. Pauls Road	Articlave	£11,050	£10,519	5.0%
503289		26	Harbour Road	Ballintoy	£1,750	£1,418	23.4%
503288	Ballintoy Church (C Of I)	24	Harbour Road	Ballintoy	£6,650	£5,985	11.1%
503402	St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church	40	Main Street	Ballintoy	£8,825	£7,943	11.1%
503405	St Joseph's Church Hall	43	Main Street	Ballintoy	£2,850	£2,565	11.1%
503374	Ballintoy Gospel Hall	10	Main Street	Ballintoy	£8,200	£7,611	7.7%
500567	St Mary's Ballinlea Church Hall	55	Ballinlea Road	Ballycastle	£2,275	£910	150.0%
500564	St Mary's Ballinlea Parochial House	52	Ballinlea Road	Ballycastle	£1,860	£893	108.3%
503562		137	Whitepark Road	Ballycastle	£4,900	£2,940	66.7%
503922	St James's Church (C Of I)		Church Road	Ballycastle	£8,500	£6,885	23.5%
499171		9A	The Diamond	Ballycastle	£7,150	£5,792	23.4%
498737	Quay Road Hall	58	Ann Street	Ballycastle	£11,975	£10,778	11.1%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
500566	St Mary's Ballinlea Roman Catholic Church	54	Ballinlea Road	Ballycastle	£5,350	£4,815	11.1%
498819	St Thomas' Church Church Of Ireland		Churchquarter	Ballycastle	£3,300	£2,970	11.1%
498826	Rathlin Roman Catholic Church	2E	Churchquarter	Ballycastle	£4,408	£3,967	11.1%
498827	Rathlin Parochial Hall	2D	Churchquarter	Ballycastle	£3,425	£3,083	11.1%
502960	Ballycastle Gospel Hall	14	Coleraine Road	Ballycastle	£3,800	£3,420	11.1%
502628	Culfeightrin Church Of Ireland	78	Cushendall Road	Ballycastle	£4,150	£3,735	11.1%
502641	St. Patricks Roman Catholic Church	98	Cushendall Road	Ballycastle	£8,475	£7,628	11.1%
502757	Glenshesk Roman Catholic Church	85	Glenshesk Road	Ballycastle	£4,650	£4,185	11.1%
499025	Mcallister Hall	5	Moyle Road	Ballycastle	£12,925	£11,633	11.1%
504220	Ramoan Presbyterian Church	137	Moyarget Road	Ballycastle	£9,615	£8,719	10.3%
502824	Ballycastle Presbyterian Church	1	Castle Street	Ballycastle	£17,825	£16,738	6.5%
504218	Ramoan Presbyterian Church Hall	135	Moyarget Road	Ballycastle	£10,332	£9,963	3.7%
499026	Ballycastle Roman Catholic Church	7	Moyle Road	Ballycastle	£29,500	£29,205	1.0%
708691	Holy Trinity Col Church Hall	3	Station Street	Ballycastle	£20,538	£22,359	-8.1%
502633	Ballyvoy Roman Catholic Church	85	Cushendall Road	Ballycastle	£12,665	£20,998	-39.7%
440842	Ballykelly Presbyterian Church	14	Main Street	Ballykelly	£11,559	£10,314	12.1%
445418	St Finloch's Roman Catholic Church		Loughermore Road	Ballykelly	£6,675	£6,008	11.1%
440847	Ballykelly Presbyterian Church Hall	20	Main Street	Ballykelly	£15,221	£23,358	-34.8%
440848	Tamlaghtfinlagan Parish Church		Main Street	Ballykelly	£4,607	£7,317	-37.0%
440851	Tamlaghtfinlagan Parish Church Hall		Main Street	Ballykelly	£4,267	£6,777	-37.0%
501599		182	Garron Road	Ballymena	£8,900	£8,010	11.1%
501962		174	Garron Road	Ballymena	£5,325	£4,793	11.1%
502141	St Patrick's RC Church	84	Glendun Road	Ballymena	£6,500	£5,850	11.1%
493844	Rasharkin Presbyterian Church Hall		Moneyleck Road	Ballymena	£3,575	£3,218	11.1%
502392		111	Torr Road	Ballymena	£4,165	£3,749	11.1%
494620		76	Ballyveely Road	Ballymena	£7,375	£7,301	1.0%
564324	St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church	176	Coolkeeran Road	Ballymena	£12,550	£12,425	1.0%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
493761	St Marys Roman Catholic Church	10	Gortahar Road	Ballymena	£15,250	£15,098	1.0%
493741	Rasharkin Free Presbyterian Church		Finvoy Road	Ballymena	£9,840	£11,365	-13.4%
1008350	Saint Olcan's Parish Centre	7	Gortahar Road	Ballymena	£15,764	£20,340	-22.5%
564543		44A	Lough Road	Ballymena	£1,904	£3,024	-37.0%
496475	Drumreagh Presbyterian Church	28	Beechwood Drive	Ballymoney	£1,512	£1,047	44.4%
499959	Toberdoney Presbyterian Church	55	Toberdoney Road	Ballymoney	£20,423	£18,193	12.3%
497533	Drumreagh Presbyterian Church	43	Bendooragh Road	Ballymoney	£2,075	£1,868	11.1%
566646		N57	Carncullagh Road	Ballymoney	£7,750	£6,975	11.1%
495848	Reformed Presbyterian Church		Charlotte Street	Ballymoney	£9,875	£8,888	11.1%
493705	Finvoy Presbyterian Church Hall	185A	Finvoy Road	Ballymoney	£16,605	£14,944	11.1%
498119	St. Patricks C Of Ireland Hall	177	Glenshesk Road	Ballymoney	£5,920	£5,328	11.1%
566872		114	Kirk Road	Ballymoney	£5,650	£5,085	11.1%
565917	Trinity Presbyterian Church Hall		Rodeing Foot	Ballymoney	£27,100	£24,390	11.1%
499950		28	Toberdoney Road	Ballymoney	£3,075	£2,768	11.1%
566644	Dervock Presbyterian Church	55	Carncullagh Road	Ballymoney	£12,680	£11,577	9.5%
493909	Finvoy Presbyterian Church	94	Mullan Road	Ballymoney	£2,753	£2,624	4.9%
564284		60	Coolkeeran Road	Ballymoney	£10,192	£9,828	3.7%
497555	Roman Catholic Church	120	Bendooragh Road	Ballymoney	£5,800	£5,742	1.0%
564286		61	Coolkeeran Road	Ballymoney	£3,475	£3,440	1.0%
564288		63	Coolkeeran Road	Ballymoney	£8,700	£8,613	1.0%
493687		157	Finvoy Road	Ballymoney	£4,225	£4,184	1.0%
493704	Finvoy Presbyterian Church	185	Finvoy Road	Ballymoney	£9,140	£9,049	1.0%
494771	Garryduff Presbyterian Church	126	Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	£6,645	£6,580	1.0%
566911	Our Lady And St John's Roman Catholic Church		Knock Road	Ballymoney	£4,750	£4,703	1.0%
568336	St Patricks Church Of Ireland		Queen Street	Ballymoney	£17,600	£17,424	1.0%
565916	Trinity Presbyterian Church		Rodeing Foot	Ballymoney	£7,625	£7,549	1.0%
495871	St James's Presbyterian Church Hall		St. James Road	Ballymoney	£19,300	£19,107	1.0%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
497351	Kilraughts Presbyterian Church	56	Moyan Road	Ballymoney	£29,639	£29,382	0.9%
565677	The Church Of God Hall		Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	£63,336	£63,326	0.0%
566873		115	Kirk Road	Ballymoney	£15,627	£15,676	-0.3%
495778		81	Castle Street	Ballymoney	£17,229	£17,599	-2.1%
677494	Garryduff Presbyterian Church Hall	122A	Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	£20,004	£20,424	-2.1%
497121		118	Fivey Road	Ballymoney	£19,680	£20,353	-3.3%
495869	St James's Presbyterian Church		St. James Road	Ballymoney	£14,650	£15,954	-8.2%
495846	Court House	75	Charlotte Street	Ballymoney	£9,600	£10,556	-9.1%
494884	Kilraughts Reformed Church Hall	175	Kilraughts Road	Ballymoney	£15,850	£19,709	-19.6%
1032177		34	Ballymena Road	Ballymoney	£22,413	£28,920	-22.5%
496274	Ballymoney Methodist Church		Seymour Street	Ballymoney	£10,983	£14,164	-22.5%
497463	Drumreagh Church	104	Bann Road	Ballymoney	£17,765	£23,648	-24.9%
568633	Ballymoney First Presbyterian Church	65	Meetinghouse Street	Ballymoney	£22,472	£31,561	-28.8%
495775		75	Castle Street	Ballymoney	£19,288	£28,642	-32.7%
814322	Ballymoney Elim Church	47	Knock Road	Ballymoney	£23,293	£34,589	-32.7%
495529	Ballymoney Free Presbyterian Church		Market Street	Ballymoney	£62,862	£94,682	-33.6%
568438		22	Henry Street	Ballymoney	£3,760	£5,816	-35.4%
495852		81-83	Charlotte Street	Ballymoney	£5,797	£9,207	-37.0%
568392		12	Edward Street	Ballymoney	£4,561	£7,244	-37.0%
503953	Drumtullagh Church (C Of I) Hall	121	Ballinlea Road	Ballymoney	£1,919	£3,182	-39.7%
568700	Parish Centre		Queen Street	Ballymoney	£18,240	£30,240	-39.7%
567619	Kingdom Hall Of Jehovah's Witnesses		Ballybrakes Road	Ballymoney	£3,784	£7,024	-46.1%
498487		88	Haw Road	Bushmills	£4,625	£4,163	11.1%
499374	The Church Of The Redeemer	60	Main Street	Bushmills	£2,425	£2,183	11.1%
499538	St Cuthbert's RC Church		Priestland Road	Bushmills	£4,175	£3,758	11.1%
500894	Dunseverick Parish Church	223	Whitepark Road	Bushmills	£5,950	£5,355	11.1%
499798	Toberkeagh Presbyterian Church	116-118	Moycraig Road	Bushmills	£14,600	£13,833	5.5%
500786	Croaghmore Presbyterian Church	76	Moycraig Road	Bushmills	£12,030	£11,415	5.4%
499539		9	Priestland Road	Bushmills	£3,250	£3,094	5.0%
498327		1	Cabragh Road	Bushmills	£8,307	£7,927	4.8%
499542	Dunluce Parish Hall	13	Priestland Road	Bushmills	£15,904	£15,336	3.7%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
499544	St John The Baptist's Church	18	Priestland Road	Bushmills	£8,200	£8,118	1.0%
500884		200	Whitepark Road	Bushmills	£5,928	£6,208	-4.5%
499473		174	Main Street	Bushmills	£35,825	£40,366	-11.2%
572390	Bushmills Free Presbyterian Church	20	Priestland Road	Bushmills	£2,412	£2,848	-15.3%
384272	Dunluce Presbyterian Church	24	Priestland Road	Bushmills	£19,957	£27,178	-26.6%
379083	Ballywoodock Roman Catholic Church	40	Ballywoodock Road	Castlerock	£3,750	£3,375	11.1%
379447	Christ Church (C Of I)	50	Main Street	Castlerock	£7,225	£6,503	11.1%
379121	Castlerock Presbyterian Church	32	Circular Road	Castlerock	£15,994	£15,111	5.8%
727452		47	Main Street	Cloughmills	£712	£431	65.2%
566389		21A	Main Street	Cloughmills	£1,111	£707	57.1%
566230	Killagan Parish Church (C Of I)		Drumadoon Road	Cloughmills	£5,720	£5,469	4.6%
566234		2	Drumbare Road	Cloughmills	£4,700	£4,653	1.0%
776416	Cloughmills Free Presbyterian Church		Culcrum Road	Cloughmills	£8,845	£14,727	-39.9%
566120	Loughiel Church	5	Culcrum Road	Cloughmills	£7,500	£7,425	1.0%
566121	Loughiel Church Hall		Culcrum Road	Cloughmills	£14,840	£15,743	-5.7%
396145		89	Castleroe Road	Coleraine	£1,020	£523	95.0%
382683	Timber Depot		Hillmans Way	Coleraine	£106,485	£89,310	19.2%
388582	St Mary's Church (Church Of Ireland)	31	Dunderg Road	Coleraine	£19,071	£16,840	13.2%
387576	Ballyclabber Reformed Presbyterian	35	Ballyrashane Road	Coleraine	£7,775	£6,998	11.1%
387592	Ballyrashane Presbyterian Church Hall		Ballyrashane Road	Coleraine	£4,875	£4,388	11.1%
383644	Ballywatt Leggs Presbyterian Church	28	Ballywatt Road	Coleraine	£17,243	£15,519	11.1%
380136	Representative Church Body	48-56	Brook Street	Coleraine	£19,000	£17,100	11.1%
380319	St. Patricks Church		Church Street	Coleraine	£16,375	£14,738	11.1%
376054	Dromore Presbyterian Church	78	Coolyvenny Road	Coleraine	£4,225	£3,803	11.1%
376087	Mullaghinch Roman Catholic Church	31	Cullycapple Road	Coleraine	£8,000	£7,200	11.1%
388734	Formoyle Parish Church	16	Formoyle Road	Coleraine	£3,775	£3,398	11.1%
392629	Killeague Presbyterian Church	90	Killeague Road	Coleraine	£6,675	£6,008	11.1%
381784		1	Kyles Brae	Coleraine	£3,750	£3,375	11.1%
381785	St Johns Roman Catholic Church	5	Kyles Brae	Coleraine	£10,100	£9,090	11.1%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
390155		36	Long Commons	Coleraine	£25,560	£23,004	11.1%
387934	St Paul's Church (Church Of Ireland)	181	Loughan Road	Coleraine	£6,075	£5,468	11.1%
380773	Second Presbyterian Church	10	New Row	Coleraine	£32,125	£28,913	11.1%
380841	Coleraine Congregational Church	46	New Row	Coleraine	£8,400	£7,560	11.1%
390547	St Malachy's RC Church		Nursery Avenue	Coleraine	£18,500	£16,650	11.1%
390549	St Malachys Roman Catholic Church	76	Nursery Avenue	Coleraine	£14,775	£13,298	11.1%
398539	Elim Pentecostal Church		Pates Lane	Coleraine	£6,200	£5,580	11.1%
388098	St Johns Church		Rectory Road	Coleraine	£3,875	£3,488	11.1%
388100	St Johns Church Hall	12	Rectory Road	Coleraine	£2,900	£2,610	11.1%
390755	Terrace Row Presbyterian Church Hall		Terrace Row	Coleraine	£32,950	£29,656	11.1%
383643	Ballywatt Leggs Presbyterian Church Hall	26	Ballywatt Road	Coleraine	£9,380	£8,466	10.8%
389165	2nd Dunboe Presbyterian Church	236	Windyhill Road	Coleraine	£12,310	£11,385	8.1%
388587		43	Dunderg Road	Coleraine	£5,685	£5,423	4.8%
388481	Mascoquin Prebyterian Church	116	Coolyvenny Road	Coleraine	£49,309	£49,132	0.4%
388921	Crossgar Presbyterian Church	114	Moneybrannon Road	Coleraine	£17,113	£17,336	-1.3%
381741	Hazelbank Presbyterian Church		Hazelbank Road	Coleraine	£21,161	£22,219	-4.8%
377938	Coleraine Free Presbyterian Church		Cloyfin Road	Coleraine	£21,105	£22,387	-5.7%
997311	Abundant Life Christian Healing Centre	19	Hall Road	Coleraine	£6,758	£7,358	-8.2%
379923	Coleraine First Presbyterian Church		Abbey Street	Coleraine	£32,478	£35,482	-8.5%
926689		117A	Ballycastle Road	Coleraine	£12,523	£14,527	-13.8%
389086		16	Ringrash Road	Coleraine	£1,360	£1,632	-16.7%
387593	Ballyrashane Presbyterian Church	71	Ballyrashane Road	Coleraine	£26,183	£31,554	-17.0%
381782	St John's Church (Church Of Ireland)		Killowen Street	Coleraine	£22,939	£27,998	-18.1%
380339	Methodist Church		Circular Road	Coleraine	£12,330	£15,125	-18.5%
388918		101	Moneybrannon Road	Coleraine	£9,477	£12,333	-23.2%
392204	St. Guaire's Church Of Ireland	81	Ardreagh Road	Coleraine	£13,043	£17,096	-23.7%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
380468	Kingdom Hall Of Jehovah's Witnesses	15A	Hawthorn Terrace	Coleraine	£6,122	£8,702	-29.6%
690510	Our Lady Of The Assumption Church Hall		Cullycapple Road	Coleraine	£10,248	£14,639	-30.0%
721723	St Andrew's Church (Church Of Ireland)		Burn Road	Coleraine	£8,150	£12,102	-32.7%
392202	Aghadowey Presbyterian Church Hall	70	Ardreagh Road	Coleraine	£25,500	£38,426	-33.6%
380380		38A	Circular Road	Coleraine	£2,368	£3,663	-35.4%
392657	Killeague Presbyterian Church Church Hall	50	Kinnyglass Road	Coleraine	£6,592	£10,197	-35.4%
379925	Coleraine Baptist Church		Abbey Street	Coleraine	£25,928	£40,629	-36.2%
380138		63	Brook Street	Coleraine	£3,298	£5,166	-36.2%
379938	Church Of Christ	16	Artillery Road	Coleraine	£7,412	£11,772	-37.0%
375877		57	Ballylintagh Road	Coleraine	£1,539	£2,444	-37.0%
819959		6	Knocklynn Road	Coleraine	£15,275	£24,438	-37.5%
377877	Ballysally Presbyterian Church	25	Ballysally Road	Coleraine	£14,402	£23,877	-39.7%
382259	Coleraine Independent Methodist Church		Ballycastle Road	Coleraine	£13,200	£22,275	-40.7%
390578		2C	Ratheane Avenue	Coleraine	£4,840	£8,168	-40.7%
813186	The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints	8	Sandelfields	Coleraine	£11,965	£20,188	-40.7%
376132		81	Curragh Road	Coleraine	£8,023	£14,936	-46.3%
501047	Layde Church Church Of Ireland		Chapel Road	Cushendall	£6,000	£5,400	11.1%
501449	Cushendall Presbyterian Church	24	Shore Road	Cushendall	£3,325	£2,993	11.1%
501063	St Marys Roman Catholic Church	30	Chapel Road	Cushendall	£11,113	£11,001	1.0%
946181		20	Chapel Road	Cushendall	£19,215	£20,176	-4.8%
502226	Cushendun Parochial Hall	157	Layde Road	Cushendall	£6,144	£8,554	-28.2%
502227	Ardicoan Roman Catholic Church	90	Knocknacarry Road	Cushendun	£1,504	£2,094	-28.2%
564951	Dervock Mission Hall	212	Knock Road	Dervock	£968	£767	26.2%
564815	Derrykeighan Parish Church (C Of I)	230	Castlecat Road	Dervock	£6,100	£6,039	1.0%
564804	Dervock Reformed Presbyterian Church	210	Castlecat Road	Dervock	£23,095	£27,849	-17.1%
448631	Bovevagh Presbyterian Church	351	Ballyquin Road	Dungiven	£11,775	£10,598	11.1%
444044	Banagher Church (C Of I)		Feeny Road	Dungiven	£5,725	£5,153	11.1%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
444107		285A	Foreglen Road	Dungiven	£7,700	£6,930	11.1%
448955	Church Of The Immaculate Conception	30	Gortnahey Road	Dungiven	£4,450	£4,005	11.1%
442371	St Canices Hall	41	Main Street	Dungiven	£9,575	£8,618	11.1%
442539		172	Main Street	Dungiven	£8,375	£7,538	11.1%
442632		4	New Street	Dungiven	£7,225	£6,503	11.1%
442633	Presbyterian Church		New Street	Dungiven	£7,500	£6,750	11.1%
444399	The Representative Church Body	6	Rallagh Road	Dungiven	£4,025	£3,623	11.1%
448901		8	Flanders Road	Dungiven	£825	£743	11.0%
442540	Dungiven Church Church Hall	174	Main Street	Dungiven	£11,862	£11,439	3.7%
449133	St Patrick's R C Church	21	Chapel Road	Dungiven	£34,555	£33,727	2.5%
448876	Representative Church Body	325A	Drumrane Road	Dungiven	£3,296	£4,635	-28.9%
448959		37	Gortnahey Road	Dungiven	£12,672	£21,384	-40.7%
567486		10	Station Road	Dunloy	£7,028	£6,777	3.7%
717247	St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church	16	Bridge Road	Dunloy	£33,972	£34,683	-2.0%
567394	Dunloy Presbyterian Church	19	Main Street	Dunloy	£5,504	£5,760	-4.4%
567126		19	Bridge Road	Dunloy	£38,458	£44,438	-13.5%
443869	Hall	300	Altinure Road	Feeny	£8,675	£7,808	11.1%
444198	St Joseph's RC Church		Glenedra Road	Feeny	£10,398	£9,358	11.1%
444253		4	Main Street	Feeny	£2,375	£2,138	11.1%
392311		82	Boleran Road	Garvagh	£11,650	£10,485	11.1%
384424		16	Bridge Street	Garvagh	£1,075	£968	11.1%
375934	Moneydig Gospel Hall		Carrowreagh Road	Garvagh	£1,625	£1,463	11.1%
384718		35	Glen Road	Garvagh	£8,700	£7,830	11.1%
384980	Moyletra Church	88	Kurin Road	Garvagh	£5,400	£4,860	11.1%
392373	Ringsend Presbyterian Church	139	Cashel Road	Garvagh	£9,231	£8,389	10.0%
384766		52	Grove Road	Garvagh	£2,020	£1,845	9.5%
385126	2nd Garvagh Presbyterian Church	12B	Main Street	Garvagh	£39,178	£38,045	3.0%
385241	St Paul's (C Of I) Church Hall		Main Street	Garvagh	£12,510	£12,503	0.1%
384909	First Garvagh Presbyterian Church	31	Kilrea Road	Garvagh	£27,270	£28,634	-4.8%
376407	Moneydig Presbyterian Church		Moneydig Road	Garvagh	£18,550	£22,180	-16.4%
392647		2	Killykergan Road	Garvagh	£5,432	£7,759	-30.0%
384895		6-14	Killyvally Road	Garvagh	£21,494	£30,776	-30.2%
392308		77	Boleran Road	Garvagh	£11,270	£17,220	-34.6%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
385110		1A	Main Street	Garvagh	£3,568	£5,519	-35.4%
820485	Garvagh Free Presbyterian Church	24	Fort Road	Garvagh	£9,875	£20,899	-52.7%
445621	Cregan Roman Catholic Church		Brisland Road	Greysteel	£30,464	£29,376	3.7%
445620	St Ann's Hall		Brisland Road	Greysteel	£8,704	£13,824	-37.0%
386711		20	Boveedy Road	Kilrea	£1,600	£1,440	11.1%
386865	St Patricks's Church (C Of I)	37	Church Street	Kilrea	£10,975	£9,878	11.1%
387011		117	Drumagarnier Road	Kilrea	£11,675	£10,508	11.1%
387323		69	Maghera Street	Kilrea	£7,725	£6,953	11.1%
387344		2A	Moneygran Road	Kilrea	£3,100	£2,790	11.1%
386717		30	Boveedy Road	Kilrea	£9,822	£8,900	10.4%
387392		38	New Row	Kilrea	£16,240	£15,660	3.7%
387123	St Annes Chapel		Garvagh Road	Kilrea	£15,960	£16,929	-5.7%
386846	Kilrea First Presbyterian Church		Church Street	Kilrea	£19,482	£25,308	-23.0%
446459	St Aidans Roman Catholic Church Hall	47	Duncrun Road	Limavady	£7,375	£5,025	46.8%
446660	Myroe Presbyterian Church		Seacoast Road	Limavady	£7,010	£6,165	13.7%
446794		472	Seacoast Road	Limavady	£11,950	£10,643	12.3%
439759	Aghanloo Church (C Of I)	68	Aghanloo Road	Limavady	£4,600	£4,140	11.1%
444530	Carrick Church	175A	Ballyquin Road	Limavady	£4,375	£3,938	11.1%
439836	Derrymore Presbyterian Church	54A	Bolea Road	Limavady	£9,025	£8,123	11.1%
447351	Drumachose Presbyterian Church	27	Church Street	Limavady	£8,275	£7,448	11.1%
440593		122	Drumrane Road	Limavady	£8,475	£7,628	11.1%
440037	Balteagh Parish Church	148	Drumsurn Road	Limavady	£4,000	£3,600	11.1%
446456	St Aidan's Roman Catholic Church	45	Duncrun Road	Limavady	£7,425	£6,683	11.1%
446475	Tamlaghard Parish Church	92-94	Duncrun Road	Limavady	£6,350	£5,715	11.1%
443553		5	Greystone Road	Limavady	£6,600	£5,940	11.1%
441284	St Mary's RC Church	117	Irish Green Street	Limavady	£12,325	£11,093	11.1%
447438	Second Limavady Presbyterian Church		Irish Green Street	Limavady	£7,925	£7,133	11.1%
446533	St John's Church (Church Of Ireland)	30	Lomond Road	Limavady	£2,700	£2,430	11.1%
888150	Myroe Presbyterian Church Hall	114	Seacoast Road	Limavady	£17,940	£16,720	7.3%
444686	St Matthew's Roman Catholic Church		Drumsurn Road	Limavady	£17,065	£16,590	2.9%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
444645	Ballyteagh Presbyterian Church	199	Drumsurn Road	Limavady	£26,264	£25,888	1.5%
448197	Christ Church Hall	78	Main Street	Limavady	£29,163	£29,403	-0.8%
447484		4	Scroggy Road	Limavady	£40,110	£42,545	-5.7%
447374		63	Scroggy Road	Limavady	£12,028	£13,964	-13.9%
447962	Methodist Manse	99	Irish Green Street	Limavady	£7,007	£8,892	-21.2%
447918	Limavady Gospel Hall	17-33	Irish Green Street	Limavady	£12,533	£17,902	-30.0%
447352	Presbyterian Church Hall	27A	Church Street	Limavady	£12,784	£20,304	-37.0%
447369	Limavady Free Presbyterian Church	59A	Church Street	Limavady	£3,808	£6,048	-37.0%
447420		100	Connell Street	Limavady	£1,734	£2,754	-37.0%
443554	Limavady Reformed Presbyterian Church	5A	Greystone Road	Limavady	£6,834	£10,854	-37.0%
447439	Second Presbyterian Church Hall		Irish Green Street	Limavady	£10,523	£16,713	-37.0%
448328	Limavady Baptist Tabernacle	23	Protestant Street	Limavady	£19,360	£32,670	-40.7%
499836	Mosside Presbyterian Church	207	Moycraig Road	Mosside	£27,199	£27,364	-0.6%
387543	Ballywillan Presbyterian Church Hall	129	Atlantic Road	Portrush	£31,675	£28,508	11.1%
393132	Clarke Memorial Methodist Church		Causeway Street	Portrush	£5,725	£5,153	11.1%
393286	Parochial House	111	Causeway Street	Portrush	£19,158	£17,242	11.1%
393864	Portrush Presbyterian Church	1	Main Street	Portrush	£31,388	£28,249	11.1%
393916		62	Main Street	Portrush	£21,300	£19,171	11.1%
386374	Glenmanus Reformed Presbyterian Church	23	Portstewart Road	Portrush	£9,175	£8,258	11.1%
394400	Kelly Memorial Hall		Victoria Street	Portrush	£14,572	£13,852	5.2%
384157	Ballymagarry Mission Hall	42	Leeke Road	Portrush	£661	£1,022	-35.3%
393288	St Patricks Church Hall (Roman Catholic)	112	Causeway Street	Portrush	£7,840	£12,128	-35.4%
393493	Adam Clarke Memorial Methodist Church Hall	1	Eglinton Street	Portrush	£4,736	£7,326	-35.4%
393465		16C	Dunluce Avenue	Portrush	£6,210	£9,863	-37.0%
386361	Portrush Baptist Church		Portstewart Road	Portrush	£6,907	£10,970	-37.0%
386367		16	Portstewart Road	Portrush	£2,890	£4,590	-37.0%
393710	Portrush Pentecostal Church	13	Hamilton Place	Portrush	£2,399	£3,829	-37.3%
390949	Agherton Church Hall	19	Church Street	Portstewart	£12,600	£11,340	11.1%
391242	Portstewart Methodist Church	1A	Heathmount	Portstewart	£4,475	£4,028	11.1%
392067		50	The Promenade	Portstewart	£3,000	£2,700	11.1%

Property ID	Building Name	No	Street	Town	Draft NAV	Current NAV	% Change
390951	Portstewart Presbyterian Church	9	Church Street	Portstewart	£16,685	£15,705	6.2%
391928		4	The Crescent	Portstewart	£14,600	£14,603	0.0%
815100	Star Of The Sea Roman Catholic Church	29	The Diamond	Portstewart	£19,800	£19,798	0.0%
395175	House	30	Mill Road	Portstewart	£26,880	£28,224	-4.8%
973753	Portstewart Baptist Church	172-174	Coleraine Road	Portstewart	£55,040	£71,578	-23.1%
391169	Portstewart Presbyterian Church Hall	2-4	Central Avenue	Portstewart	£13,193	£17,922	-26.4%
392155		44	Upper Heathmount	Portstewart	£2,624	£4,059	-35.4%
390960	Agherton Church Hall	19	Church Street	Portstewart	£9,452	£15,012	-37.0%
391074		14	Enfield Street	Portstewart	£4,219	£6,693	-37.0%
693226	St Andrew's Parish Church Hall	21A	Church Road	Rasharkin	£3,975	£3,578	11.1%
493818	Rasharkin Presbyterian Church Hall	49-51	Main Street	Rasharkin	£8,425	£7,583	11.1%
494176	St Andrews Parish Church	21	Church Road	Rasharkin	£4,500	£4,455	1.0%
493835	Rasharkin Presbyterian Church		Moneyleck Road	Rasharkin	£14,805	£19,192	-22.9%
497286		18	Main Street	Stranocum	£1,200	£1,519	-21.0%
384782		99	Grove Road	Swatragh	£6,550	£5,895	11.1%

Data is from the current Valuation List and Draft Schedule of Values as at 13 December 2019

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the Dormant Account Fund.
(AQW 2490/17-22)

Mr Murphy: In September 2019, the Department of Finance, directed the National Lottery Community Fund, to establish a Dormant Accounts Scheme to distribute some £16 million currently available, to a range of organisations including community & voluntary groups and social enterprises, under the key themes of building capacity, resilience and sustainability.

The Lottery has consulted with stakeholders and will use the outcome of the consultation to inform a Strategic Plan which will be laid in the Assembly.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what role, if any, Stonewall has in vetting or developing Northern Ireland Civil Service policy papers; and, if they have a role, to list the papers vetted or developed in consultation with Stonewall.
(AQW 2512/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places statutory duties on all public authorities, in carrying out their functions, to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and to make equality central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. Consultation with equality groups is an important function of our equality duties.

Stonewall is one of numerous external organisations with which the NICS consults when developing policies and services.

The NICS signed up to the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme in July 2018. The Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme provides a framework to help to create an inclusive workplace that enables LGB&T colleagues to reach their full potential.

A number of resources are available to Diversity Champion employers including the Stonewall Inclusive Policy toolkit. The Stonewall Inclusive Policy Toolkit is used to inform the review or development of organisational policies, and particularly HR policies around discrimination, bullying, harassment, family and leave policies.

To date Stonewall has contributed to the development of NICS Trans Equality Policy and Transitioning at Work Guide.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the availability of sufficient funding to deliver on all the commitments in New Decade, New Approach.

(AQW 2536/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Finances are currently around £600 million short of the inescapable pressures identified by departments for 2020-21. There are additional priorities in the New Decade, New Approach document.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the adequacy of UK target carbon dioxide emission rates for buildings in achieving the zero carbon target.

(AQW 2551/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Target carbon dioxide rates for new buildings are dealt with in Building Regulations and the need is recognised for these to continue to be reduced as part of the work to achieve the net zero carbon target.

Officials are fully aware of relevant consultations on proposals for amendments to Building Regulations in England, of similar proposals for Wales, and of recent uplifts in the Republic of Ireland and are progressing proposals here with these in mind.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance, in regard to his appointment of a Special Adviser, (i) whether he independently chose his special adviser or an allocation was made by his party; (ii) how it was made known, and to whom, that he was seeking to appoint a special adviser; (iii) whether a pool of candidates was considered; (iv) if so, how many were within the pool; (v) how any pool of candidates was assembled; (vi) what were the essential and desirable criteria set for the job; (vii) by what process was the choice made; (viii) what notes and records were made and kept of the process; (ix) how fair employment obligations were met; (x) on what date(s) was the job offered and accepted; (xi) what was the contractual start date; and (xii) was the range of available salary discussed with the appointee, or was the job offered and accepted without knowledge of the likely salary.

(AQW 2593/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The appointment of my special adviser followed the requirements set out in the Code for the Appointment of Special Advisers agreed by the Executive and published by my Department on 20 January. Salary details were confirmed to me by the Permanent Secretary of my Department on 14 February. The offer of appointment was made to Eoin Rooney on 20 February and accepted on 20 February, with a contractual start date of 11 January.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on pay and remuneration for Civil Service staff.

(AQW 2635/17-22)

Mr Murphy: While the NICS has not yet made any offer regarding 2019 pay, I met with officials from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, who represent non-industrial civil servants, on 22 January. It was a constructive discussion. Since that meeting, discussions between departmental officials and trades unions have continued.

I am working closely with departmental officials to progress and resolve the NICS 2019/20 pay award for all civil service staff as a key priority. Civil service pay will be one of many issues that will be considered by the Executive in the course of agreeing a Budget for 2020-21. I plan to update my Executive colleagues on NICS pay in the near future.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Finance for an updated assessment of the implications of the McCloud judgement on public service pension scheme members in Northern Ireland, including the PSNI.

(AQW 2644/17-22)

Mr Murphy: There is a clear need to address age discrimination in devolved public service pension schemes as a consequence of the McCloud ruling. This is supported by legal advice.

The solution will need to remove the discrimination identified in the reformed schemes from 2015 and for the future. This is a complex issue, given the range of scheme benefits to take account of. As some scheme members will have been better off in the old schemes, and some better off in the new schemes, the solution must also ensure members can keep their accrued rights.

Proposals to accomplish this for devolved schemes, including the Police Pension Scheme, are currently being developed at the Collective Consultation Working Group (CCWG), which is co-ordinated by my Department and is the recognised forum for employer/employee consultation on public service pension policy. A joint statement agreed between employer/employee representatives is available on the Department of Finance website. Further updates will issue as and when there are more developments to report.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance to detail the relevant parts of the codes of ethics or associated provision governing the obligations of employees of each public sector organisation in Northern Ireland with respect to political membership and activism.

(AQW 2678/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Obligations upon civil servants are set out in section 2.5 of the NICS Code of Ethics, and section 19 and Annex 8 of Chapter 6.01 (Standards of Conduct) of the NICS Handbook. Separate rules apply to those appointed as special advisers,

set out in the Annex to the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers. All three documents are available on the Department of Finance website:

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/nics-code-ethics>

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/6-employee-relations>

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/special-adviser-appointments>

Obligations placed upon other public sector employees are a matter for the employer.

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance when he plans to lay The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. (AQW 2695/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The annual Regional Rates Order will be laid following the decision of the Executive on the 2020/21 Budget.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Finance whether successful applicants on the NI Civil Service EO1 general list (IRC 187374) will be offered any of the 250 currently vacant EO1 posts, or any other EO1 post, before the list is due to expire on 19 April 2020; and if not, whether the list will be extended to enable applicants to receive an EO1 post.

(AQW 2713/17-22)

Mr Murphy: It is expected that all successful candidates whose names appear on the published NI Civil Service EO1 general service promotion list (IRC 187374) will be made an offer before the list expires on 19 April 2020. If all successful candidates on that published list have not received an offer by that date, consideration will be given to extending the closure of the published list to facilitate offers being made.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW-2020/17-22, to detail what the information garnered from second religious question is used for by each Department.

(AQW 2811/17-22)

Mr Murphy: All Departments use the 'religion or religion brought up in' statistic from the census to inform a wide variety of personnel issues (e.g. recruitment, equality of workforce composition etc...). The requirement for such statistics stems from the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, which places a duty on all public and private sector employers to carry out regular reviews of their employment composition. Workforce equality monitoring is undertaken for all Departments by the Civil Service human resource function within the Department of Finance.

All Departments also carry out a wide range of equality screening and impact assessments when developing policies. These are required under section 75 of the NI Act 1998. Equality analysis informs the policy development process and a variety of census religion and 'religion or religion brought up in' statistics are used by Departments to support this.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance (i) what was the total staffing compliment of the public service, both permanent and agency staff, before the start of the Voluntary Exit Scheme; and (ii) what is the total current staffing compliment, both permanent and agency staff.

(AQW 2844/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The Public Sector Transformation Fund supported Voluntary Exit Schemes in departments and their ALBs over a four year period from 2015/16. NISRA data confirms there were 210,030 permanent and temporary staff (headcount) employed in the public sector in April 2015; with the equivalent October 2019 value totalling 208,454. NISRA data for the NICS alone confirms the number of permanent and temporary staff in April 2015 and October 2019 were 26,906 and 22,839 respectively. The NISRA data does not include agency workers. The Department of Finance does not hold centrally the number of agency workers across the public service.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what allocation, under Barnett consequentials, Northern Ireland has received in respect of the apprenticeship levy.

(AQW 2846/17-22)

Mr Murphy: The table below shows impact of the Apprenticeship Levy on the block (£million).

£million	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
HM Treasury Announcement	76	79	82
SR 2015 Consequential – Other Apprenticeships	-52	-52	-52
Impact of Apprenticeship Levy policy changes	24	27	30
Estimated Cost to Public Sector	-29	-29	-29
Net impact on NI Resource DEL	-5	-2	1

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance (i) whether he has made any appointments under the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 since coming into office this year; and (ii) are any such appointments anticipated.

(AQW 2848/17-22)

Mr Murphy: As Minister of Finance, (i) I have made one appointment of a special advisor under the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 since coming into office this year; and (ii) I do not anticipate making any other such appointments.

Mr Muir asked the Minister of Finance on what dates (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic rates bills will be issued.

(AQW 3032/17-22)

Mr Murphy: Both domestic and non-domestic Rate Bills will be issued in April 2020 after the Regional Rates Order is made.

Department of Health

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Health (i) how many claims have been made against the Health Service for medical negligence; (ii) how much has been paid out in compensation; and (iii) what is the total legal cost to the Health Service of these actions, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 696/17-22)

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): Information on the number of (i) new clinical / social care negligence cases and the amount paid in (ii) damages and (iii) legal costs in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below.

Clinical Negligence Cases Opened and Payments (2016/17 – 2018/19)

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
New Cases Opened	667	744	704
Damaged Paid	£19,683,183	£26,324,377	£21,240,946
Legal Costs	£8,857,878	£9,327,463	£7,968,587
Total Paid	£28,541,061	£35,651,840	£29,209,533

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how he plans to address the backlog in waiting times for Brackenburn Clinic.

(AQW 1156/17-22)

Mr Swann: A Review of Gender Identity Services in Northern Ireland is underway. My Department, in collaboration with the Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust, medical experts and service user representatives, under the auspices of the Gender Identity Pathway Review Group, are working together to identify a model of care to address the needs of those clients, including waiting times for Brackenburn.

In addition, the Belfast HSC Trust is also actively exploring the potential for referring patients from Brackenburn's waiting list to NHS service providers in other UK jurisdictions however as yet no providers with additional service capacity have been identified.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Health what plans he has to improve services for sufferers of (i) lipoedema; and (ii) lymphoedema.

(AQW 1284/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Lymphoedema Network has a five year improvement programme in place to cover the period 2019-2024. This will result in improvements for people with lymphoedema and lipoedema.

Examples of key improvement areas include -

Training and development

- provision of undergraduate and post graduate training and development to increase knowledge relating to identification and management of lymphoedema and lipoedema;
- increase multi-disciplinary team (MDT) awareness of the management of non cellulitic red legs; and
- joint hosting of the All Island Lymphoedema conference.

Development of new and enhanced patient pathways

- development of a new regional care pathway for paediatrics;
- testing of new MDT partnerships to build skills in the management of simple lymphoedema and the potential to scale and spread; and
- testing of new service models e.g. group sessions to support self-management and the potential to scale and spread.

Enhancing partnerships

- Continue to build relationships and partnerships to share learning and improve care.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health (i) to provide the names of the manufacturers of insulin pumps being used in the Health Service; (ii) for a breakdown of the amount of pumps being distributed to diabetes patients; and (iii) for an update on the average waiting times for insulin pumps in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1470/17-22)

Mr Swann: The names of the manufacturers of insulin pumps being used in the Health Service are as follows: Medtronic, Roche, Tandem, Insulet (Omnipod) Ypsomed and Air Liquide.

The number of pumps distributed to adult and paediatric patients with diabetes since 2016/17 is shown below. Figures relate to new pumps and do not include replacement pumps issued to pre-existing insulin pump users.

Number of insulin pumps issued

	Belfast HSCT	Northern HSCT	South Eastern HSCT	Southern HSCT	Western HSCT
2016/17	34	20	51	42	12
2017/18	22	29	40	25	14
2018/19	21	8	33	26	19
2019/20 (up to 31st Jan 2020)	23	21	48	28	12

- (iii) There are a number of factors to consider before a patient can access an insulin pump including adherence to NICE guidelines, patient readiness and clinical priority. However, waiting times in each Health and Social Care Trust are as follows:

Belfast HSCT	The waiting list for pre pump assessment is approximately 24 months. There is no waiting list for insulin pumps.
Northern HSCT	Details of the average waiting time for an insulin pump is not available.
South Eastern HSCT	Waiting time for pre-pump assessment varies but can be up to 12 months.
Southern HSCT	No waiting times for insulin pumps or assessment for insulin pumps for children and young people. Adult waiting time for pre pump assessment is currently 13 months.
Western HSCT	For patients prioritised as having an urgent clinical need, access to insulin pump therapy is within 1-2 months. Average waiting time for routine pump start for paediatric patients is 6-12 months after assessment is completed.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what proposals he has to modernise communication between patients and General Practices and hospitals, to improve the service for patients making appointments.

(AQW 1492/17-22)

Mr Swann: As GP practices are independent contractors there are a variety of approaches taken to communicate with patients. GP Clinical Systems can now offer, 24/7 access to booking appointments, two-way messaging between clinicians & patients, and facilitate requests for repeat medications. Some practices only offer a subset of these services.

The Health & Social Care Board ran the "Ask My GP" pilot in 2018/19, providing a telephone triage model of pre appointment assessment prior to appointment booking. The Health & Social Care Board also approved grants for GP practices to upgrade GP telephone systems to provide patients with access to a menu of services.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what representations he has made to HM Revenue & Customs on doctors' employers' contributions in Northern Ireland, which are currently leading to punitive tax bills on money unearned.

(AQW 1494/17-22)

Mr Swann: As pension taxation is a reserved matter, I - along with the Minister of Finance - have written to the UK Government highlighting the serious harm being felt across HSC by the loss of capacity and the impact delayed or cancelled clinics are having on the long-term health and well-being of the population, due to the effect of the HMRC Annual Allowance tax charge.

Furthermore, I shall urge that serious and immediate consideration be given to the outcome of an HMRC review of Annual Allowance, the results of which are expected on 11 March.

I will await the outcome of the HMRC review before considering what steps to take to address the difficulties caused locally by the Annual Allowance tax charges.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, in light of the COPNI Home Truths report, whether he intends to bring forward legislation that will provide CCTV in care settings.

(AQW 2083/17-22)

Mr Swann: Registered care home providers must comply with all current guidance and any relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act and Human Rights Act, when giving consideration to the use of CCTV in care homes.

In response to both the COPNI "Home Truths" Report and the upcoming Independent Report on Dunmurry Manor Care Home, I will give due consideration to the provision of CCTV in care settings.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health for an update on progress with adult safeguarding legislation.

(AQW 2084/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland has recommended the introduction of an Adult Safeguarding Bill in his 'Home Truths' report. I also expect the independent review of the HSC's response to Dunmurry Manor Care Home, commissioned by my Department, to produce an in-depth report on adult safeguarding very shortly. Practices concerning safeguarding must be strengthened and I will carefully consider the review's findings along with any recommendations for legislative reform in this area.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health what plans he has to enable more accessible health information to be provided for people who are blind or partially sighted.

(AQW 2089/17-22)

Mr Swann: "Making Communication Accessible for All - A Guide for Health and Social Care Staff" helps staff communicate more effectively with people with a disability or communication support need. It is included in mandatory training across all Health and Social Care Trusts. In addition, "Creating Accessible Primary Care Services for People with Sensory Loss" guidance provides information and advice to help improve access to services for people with sensory loss. As independent contractors, GPs are responsible for arrangements within their practices to support access to services for patients who are blind or partially sighted.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health how he plans to address the backlog of orthopedic surgery and reduce the waiting list.

(AQW 2090/17-22)

Mr Swann: Achievement of the New Decade, New Approach commitment on waiting times is dependent on additional investment to implement the actions which underpin transformation and reform to sustainably reduce hospital waiting times. The scale at which I will be able to tackle the unacceptable waiting lists will be greatly influenced by the outcome of the current budgetary discussions.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister of Health, in relation to the vacancies that existed in the Health and Social Care workforce as of September 2019, what the total cost would be of filling these vacancies.

(AQW 2113/17-22)

Mr Swann: For the majority of posts, there is no additional cost associated, with funding for vacancies being actively recruited already held by Trusts within their baseline. The workforce within Health and Social Care is constantly evolving and not every post will be directly replaced when it becomes vacant as we see the benefits of multi-disciplinary teams and services are re-configured. A vacant, funded post may be suppressed, and the funding used to support a new post where it is felt appropriate to do so. It is not possible, therefore, to disaggregate newly created posts. Funding attached to vacant posts may also be used to fill the post on a temporary basis, with agency/locum staff.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of people who received non-NICE approved cancer drugs, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2127/17-22)

Mr Swann: The information is not held in the format requested by the Department, the Health and Social Care Board or the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1079/17-22, (i) whether a business case has been submitted for (a) Craigavon Area Hospital redevelopment phase 1; (b) low voltage works at Craigavon and Daisyhill Hospitals; and (c) Lurgan Community Treatment and Care Centre; (ii) what procurement method was used; and (iii) whether any funding has been ring-fenced for these proposals.

(AQW 2130/17-22)

Mr Swann:

- (i) Business cases have been submitted for (a) Craigavon Area Hospital redevelopment Phase 1 and (b) Low Voltage works at Craigavon. My Department has not received business cases for (b) Low Voltage works at Daisy Hill nor (c) Lurgan Community Treatment and Care Centre.
- (ii) None of the projects have progressed to procurement.
- (iii) Funding has not been allocated for any of the proposals.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health when he will answer AQW 870/17-22.

(AQW 2138/17-22)

Mr Swann: The response to AQW870/19-22 was provided to you on Friday 14th February 2020.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health how many mental health teams are based in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2151/17-22)

Mr Swann: There are 47 teams currently working across Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and adult mental health services in the Belfast Trust.

This figure includes 11 separate inpatient teams (based at the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre, Beechcroft and Knockbracken Healthcare Park) and 36 community mental health teams (ranging from large teams such as the Home Treatment Team and core mental health teams to small specialised community teams such as Clozapine Team and the Lithium Team).

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1043/17-22, to detail the occasions on which his Department has been in contact with the Irish Department of Health to discuss the provision of paediatric pathology services, including (i) dates; (ii) type of contact; and (iii) content of the contact.

(AQW 2155/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department has been in contact with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) on a number of occasions regarding this issue.

Senior officials wrote to colleagues in ROI on 14 November 2018 to seek agreement to engage in discussions on this issue. An initial conversation followed on 15 November 2018 with Chief Medical Officers in both jurisdictions to consider how best to facilitate some joint work on identifying options for a potential all-island service model similar to the Paediatric Cardiology approach.

On 27 February 2019, my senior officials wrote to formally initiate collaborative working and to seek agreement to establish a small internationally-led expert group to carry out a review of the services provided in both jurisdictions and to make recommendations for an all-island service model to maximise available resources North and South.

A meeting was held with colleagues in RoI on 25 March 2019 to scope the terms of reference and to consider the structure and format of the proposed review. Following the meeting draft terms of reference were shared with colleagues in RoI. Colleagues there requested some time to gather information on the current service in RoI and to discuss in more detail with service providers and respective colleges in the South.

My Department's Chief Medical Officer wrote to his counterpart on 31 July 2019 seeking to include this issue on the agenda at an upcoming Cross Jurisdictional Oversight meeting. At that meeting held on 5 November 2019 colleagues in RoI indicated that they were supportive in principle with the approach and agreed to engage with the HSE in the South to consider the way forward.

Between April 2019 and end January 2020 there has been email communication on a number of occasions with colleagues in RoI seeking updates to progress this work.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health when the Continuing Healthcare consultation report will be published; and whether he has made a decision on Continuing Healthcare.

(AQW 2156/17-22)

Mr Swann: I will shortly consider the continuing healthcare consultation responses and then announce next steps in due course.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1081/17-22, can he give a timeline when he expects (i) the final business case to be submitted to his Department; and (ii) when he expects construction to begin on site.

(AQW 2180/17-22)

Mr Swann: I currently expect the Full Business Case (FBC) for the Newry Community Treatment and Care Centre to be formally submitted to my Department by the end of summer 2020. Subject to a satisfactory business case construction is expected to commence in the autumn 2020.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Rosebud respite facility in Derry; and whether the Cottages respite service is fully operational.
(AQW 2202/17-22)

Mr Swann: I refer the Member to my response for Written AQW 1526 17-22.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health to detail the downtime statistics for ambulances in January 2020, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 2208/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the downtime of ambulances (time between calls) is not available.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Health (i) to detail any constraints on Supporting People funding; (ii) whether Health and Social Care Trusts are increasingly having to meet funding shortfalls of independent providers to ensure jointly-commissioned supported living services remain viable; and (iii) to quantify the value of such top-ups over the last five years.
(AQW 2219/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Supporting People (SP) Programme was introduced in 2003 to provide housing support services for vulnerable people in Northern Ireland to live independently. Currently, it supports around 19,000 people per year across four thematic groups: older people; mental health and disability; young people; and homelessness. The Programme is administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and delivered through a wide range of partners, including statutory bodies, housing associations, private sector companies and voluntary and community organisations.

While many SP schemes are jointly revenue funded with Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, DfC has policy, oversight and funding responsibility for the Programme. In 2003/04, the revenue budget for the Programme was £46m per annum. This increased significantly to £72.8 million by 2014. Since then, there has been a degree of variance in the budget, rising to £75.8m in 2016 before gradually returning to the 2014 baseline. This has been maintained in recent years, but in the absence of any inflationary uplifts, increasing pressures in the system mean that in practice providers have faced a 5% cut to their allocations. This has had a knock on effect on jointly funded schemes which has been highlighted to the Department and discussed with DfC.

New SP structures have been put in place by DfC and NIHE, including the establishment of a SP Programme Board. This is chaired by DfC and DoH is represented on it. The Board oversees a number of projects arising from a review of the SP Programme in 2015, including the commissioning of a review of joint funding arrangements to better understand the interdependence between the funding streams, and options for the future. Business Consultancy Services (DoF) have been engaged to undertake this review.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health to detail the areas of increased investment to fully implement improvements for palliative and end-of-life care, as outlined in New Decade, New Approach.
(AQW 2221/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care budget for 2020/21 has yet to be decided, however, it is anticipated that the Department will continue to face a shortfall and difficult decisions will have to be made. In addition to the funding requirement for inescapable pressures, additional funding is necessary to take forward the commitments set out in New Decade, New Approach. A final decision on how to implement the commitment on palliative care will not be possible until the funding position has been established.

My Department will continue to liaise with the Department of Finance in relation to the budget settlement and with Health and Social Care on options to address any residual funding shortfall.

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the palliative care services that are either fully or partially funded from his Department's budget, broken down by (i) name of service; (ii) type and category of service; (iii) location or catchment if regional or Health and Social Care Trust based; and (iv) allocated funds for 2019/20.
(AQW 2222/17-22)

Mr Swann: Palliative and end of life care services are commissioned either directly by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) or sub commissioned by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Separate commissioning arrangements are in place for adult and paediatric services.

The majority of palliative care is delivered by generalist health care professionals (the patient's usual healthcare professionals) such as GPs, District Nurses, Allied Health Professionals, Social Workers, pharmacists and hospital based doctors and nurses and nurses in care homes.

Specialist palliative care is provided by specialist health and social care personnel where patients have more complex or unresolved symptoms or care needs.

Health and Social Care Trusts deliver both generalist and specialist palliative care services. Independent voluntary hospices also provide both generalist and specialist palliative care services. A 50:50 funding arrangement is in place with hospices for the provision of agreed commissioned inpatient and community adult services.

Marie Curie inpatient and day hospice services generally cover the south eastern population and south and east Belfast. Marie Curie night sitting services are sub commissioned by all Trusts in Northern Ireland. Marie Curie are also a regional provider of the out of hours rapid response palliative care service.

The Northern Ireland Hospice provides inpatient and day hospice services for the population of north and west Belfast and the Northern HSC Trust area, as well as specialist community nursing services in the Northern, Belfast and the South Eastern Trusts and in the southern sector of the Western Trust.

Foyle Hospice provides inpatient, day hospice and specialist community nursing services primarily to the population in the northern sector of the Western Trust area.

Southern Area Hospice Services provide inpatient services from their hospice in Newry in addition to day hospice services in Newry and Dungannon. Southern Area Hospice also contributes to the specialist palliative community nursing service provided by the Southern Trust.

Children's palliative care services are provided by HSC Trusts as and when appropriate. In addition, the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice is commissioned to provide a Hospice at Home service to life limited children across the region as well as respite breaks for children and families. A Paediatric and Life Limited Service has been commissioned from the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice with Confidence and Supply funding. The service provides a specialist nursing role to support children, families and clinicians in recognising and managing palliative care needs as well as access to a dedicated bed in the NI Children's Hospice or in the child's own home. Funding for this service is available until end March 2020. Future funding options will be considered subject to satisfactory evaluation.

Confidence and Supply funding has also been made available to support a number of projects being led by the regional Palliative Care in Partnership Programme to support the improvement of palliative care for adults.

As noted, generalist and specialist palliative care services are delivered across primary, secondary and community sectors. Resources applicable to palliative care services therefore cannot be fully disaggregated.

The last available annual Trust Financial Returns for 2017/18 indicated that approximately £7million was spent on hospital palliative care services.

The table below sets out specific palliative care services where resources can be identified with anticipated spend for 2019/20.

Palliative Care Anticipated Spend 2019/20

Service	Provider	HSCB/PHA £000	HSC Trusts £000	Total £000
Hospice services	NI Hospice (Adult)	2,431	591	3,022
	(Children's - regional)	987	160	1,147
	NIH Total	3,418	751	4,169
	Marie Curie	1,833	1,537	3,370
	Southern Area Hospice	1,280	80	1,360
	Foyle Hospice	1,117	58	1,175
Total Hospices		7,648	2,426	10,074
Marie Curie Out of Hours Rapid Response Service (regional)	Marie Curie	113	246	359
Palliative and Life Limiting Service (PALLS) Children (regional)	NI Hospice (Children's)	186	0	186
Funding to support service delivery				
Project Echo (to support learning and development in palliative care - regional)	Hospice UK	375	0	375
Palliative care Transformation projects - regional	Trusts/Hospices/Others	381	1,069	1,450
Total 2019/20*		8,703	3,742	12,445

*Totals rounded

Mr Gildernew asked the Minister of Health for an update on the pilot HIV Prevention Clinic, including a breakdown on the numbers accessing pre-exposure prophylaxis and the comprehensive testing service for sexually transmitted infections. (AQW 2223/17-22)

Mr Swann: HIV risk reduction clinics are currently operating at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) and the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSC) and are non-recurrently funded. The Belfast clinics commenced in July 2018 to assess and manage an estimated 226 patients requiring pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) from across all Health Trusts. The Belfast Trust clinics also offer health advisor and psychological support to improve the health behaviours and wellbeing of PrEP patients, many of whom are vulnerable and marginalised.

By June 2019, 475 patients were attending BHSCT HIV risk reduction clinics, more than double than originally expected. Because of the unexpectedly high demand, a waiting list developed for patients referred to the BHSCT HIV risk reduction clinics. As a result in September 2019 non recurrent funding was used to increase capacity in BHSCT and HIV risk reduction clinics were set up in WHSC.

By the end of December 2019, BHSCT had 592 and WHSC 95 patients on PrEP, a total of 687. No further data are available from BHSCT at this time, but WHSC have commenced another 35 patients on PrEP to date, bring the total to over 700 almost three times the original estimate of 226.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health for an update on the progress in opening the critical care building at the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQW 2230/17-22)

Mr Swann: Currently operational are: - Levels 0 and 1: Plant to support the function of the Building; Level 2: The Accident and Emergency Department (AED); Level 3: Endoscopy Decontamination Unit; Level 4: Theatre and AED Offices and Support Accommodation.

It is anticipated that the 4 theatres in the building will open in the Spring of this year to complete the occupation of Level 3. Work is continuing on the ventilation systems on Levels 5 and 6 to allow occupation of the Intensive Care Units in Autumn 2020. Level 8 is being temporarily used for decant accommodation whilst the endocrinology and diabetic outpatients clinic is refurbished. Level 9 has been temporarily occupied by out-patients facilities since December 2018.

The Critical Care element of the building will be fully operational in Autumn 2020. The planned occupancy of the top three floors (levels 7, 8 & 9) by maternity services is dependent on the opening of the new Maternity Hospital, currently planned for 2021, and the link bridge joining the two buildings in 2022.

The helipad at the top of the Critical Care building is complete and the first test flight took place on Tuesday 18 February 2020.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of how the additional £3.7m allocated to his Department for doctors and dentists pay pressures will be spent. (AQW 2239/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am appreciative of this extra funding and will now take forward the necessary approvals in respect of implementing the 2019/20 doctors' and dentists' pay award.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health what measures his Department is taking (i) in stroke prevention; (ii) to ensure timely treatment for stroke patients in a specialist stroke unit; and (iii) to provide sufficient rehabilitation and long-term support for people who have suffered a stroke. (AQW 2241/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department's public consultation 'Reshaping Stroke Care – Saving Lives, Reducing Disability' outlined commitments to deliver improvements across stroke services. These include improved access to Transient Ischaemic Attack ("mini stroke") assessment to improve prevention; maximising the use of thrombolysis and thrombectomy; and the development of hyper acute stroke care to deliver improved outcomes in hospital-based care. In addition, Reshaping Stroke Care committed to using research commissioned by the Stroke Association to improve support in the community for stroke survivors.

My Department received 19,510 responses to the consultation and I am currently considering the consultation analysis. These are highly complex issues and it is right that I take some time to consider the evidence available and the views of all those who responded before deciding on the way forward.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Health how many hospital patients in each Health and Social Care Trust have been discharged (i) home; (ii) to care homes; and (iii) to nursing homes without a completed continuing assessment of care need, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2255/17-22)

Mr Swann: All patients who are identified as having complex needs to discharge from hospital receive a multi-disciplinary assessment of need to inform most suitable discharge pathway. On this basis there are no patients discharged from HSC Trust hospitals without a completed continuing assessment of care need.

All patients receiving ward based treatment in HSC Trust hospitals are under the care of a ward specific multi-disciplinary team (MDT) who will complete a minimum of a medical assessment and a nursing assessment and where required will complete an Allied Health Professional(s) assessments(s) and/or Social Work assessment. Since December 2019 a patient may also require a Mental Capacity Assessment.

All patients discharged from hospital will have been afforded the above or part thereof an MDT assessment processes based on their identified care and support needs and discharge requirements; a process that may not require further care and support beyond the point of safe discharge.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health what plans he has to increase mental health services for young people in Strabane.

(AQW 2272/17-22)

Mr Swann: A new Assistant Director has recently been appointed with responsibility for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) across the Western Health and Social Care Trust and recruitment is underway for a new Head of Service for Children's Mental Health and Emotional Well-being.

The Western Trust in collaboration with other stakeholders and service users, have started a re-design process to look at the delivery of mental health services for young people across the Trust area, which includes Strabane. This process will help identify any unmet need, any changes that need to be made to the existing service delivery model and any additional resources required.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of new patients that reported to the Causeway Hospital Emergency Department in each of the last eighteen months, broken down by outcome and referral.

(AQW 2295/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of new attendances at Causeway emergency department (ED). Information on the source of referral and the destination on discharge of new attendances at Causeway ED, for each of the last eighteen months is detailed in the tables below.

Table 1. Number of New Attendances at Causeway ED by Source of Referral (June 2018 – December 2019)

Year	Month	Source of Referral					New Attendances
		GP	Police/ Prison	Residential/ Nursing Home	Self/ Parent or Guardian	Other*	
2018	Jun	782	57	68	2,083	1,090	4,080
	Aug	814	59	48	2,097	960	3,978
	Sept	753	53	61	1,743	894	3,504
	Oct	807	43	47	1,818	882	3,597
	Nov	808	44	51	1,689	804	3,396
	Dec	845	60	50	1,753	843	3,551
2019	Jan	916	39	58	1,732	871	3,616
	Feb	817	47	53	1,667	842	3,426
	Mar	824	55	52	1,984	996	3,911
	Apr	892	53	56	2,042	995	4,038
	May	816	68	61	2,021	1,031	3,997
	Jun	812	63	55	1,977	948	3,855
	Jul	756	83	64	2,191	1,110	4,204
	Aug	824	65	62	2,258	1,118	4,327
	Sept	841	49	42	1,871	1,165	3,968
	Oct	827	53	53	1,942	1,149	4,024
	Nov	886	48	59	1,716	1,093	3,802
Dec	793	66	67	1,743	1,008	3,677	

* To avoid disclosure a number of categories have been grouped together into an 'Other' category. 'Other' includes referrals to ED from other hospitals, dentists, schools / educational facilities, other sources and attendances where the referral source was not known / missing.

Table 2: Number of New Attendances at Causeway ED by Destination on Discharge (June 2018 – December 2019)

Year	Month	Destination on Discharge					New Attendances
		Left Before Seen/ Treatment Complete	Discharged Home	Referred to GP	Admitted	Other*	
2018	Jul	139	1,910	976	687	368	4,080
	Aug	186	1,620	978	737	457	3,978
	Sept	131	1,497	804	658	414	3,504
	Oct	67	1,630	771	743	386	3,597
	Nov	68	1,552	756	682	338	3,396
	Dec	59	1,562	809	753	368	3,551
2019	Jan	36	1,644	799	750	387	3,616
	Feb	69	1,630	687	684	356	3,426
	Mar	92	1,850	874	676	419	3,911
	Apr	166	1,886	852	729	405	4,038
	May	102	1,908	812	731	444	3,997
	Jun	109	1,912	758	638	438	3,855
	Jul	133	1,901	908	744	518	4,204
	Aug	164	2,209	740	711	503	4,327
	Sept	145	1,913	727	752	431	3,968
	Oct	127	1,942	783	768	404	4,024
	Nov	117	1,874	724	704	383	3,802
	Dec	77	1,747	802	671	380	3,677

* To avoid disclosure a number of categories have been grouped together into an 'Other' category. 'Other' includes patients discharged to mortuaries, police custody, healthcare professionals, other EDs, outpatient's services, fracture clinics, ambulatory care and attendances where the destination was missing or unknown.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health how many patients, accessing renal services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, have been referred for treatment to other Trusts due to a lack of service provision or capacity, in each of the last eighteen months.

(AQW 2296/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Renal Unit at Antrim Hospital is currently running at full capacity. Within the last eighteen months, a total of eleven patients requiring dialysis within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) have been referred for treatment to other Trusts. NHSCT referred one patient in each of the months of October 2018, May 2019, June 2019, August 2019 and December 2019; and three patients in each of the months of November 2018 and September 2019.

Some of the patients who receive their dialysis in other Trusts live geographically closer to these units and preferred to have their dialysis at a Renal Unit closer to their home.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of recorded patients diagnosed with eating disorders, including associated mental health problems, in each Health and Social Care Trust; and what steps he will take to strengthen and rationalise service provision in this area.

(AQW 2297/17-22)

Mr Swann: The table below provides an overview of the number of recorded patients diagnosed with eating disorders currently being treated in each Health and Social Care Trust. Figures may not include those people with eating disorders seen and treated within primary care or community services, as this information is not captured by Trusts or the Department.

Trust	Patients currently being treated		
	Adult	Child and Adolescent	Total
Belfast	49	12	61
Northern	67	72	139
South Eastern	37	43	80
Southern	142	51	193
Western	32	Figure not available	32
Regional	327	178	505

Western Health and Social Care Trust do not routinely record diagnostic outcome at initial CAMHS appointments as it can take a number of appointments to determine diagnosis therefore this information is not available.

My Department is currently developing a new Mental Health Strategy and improvements in the treatment of eating disorders will be considered as part of this.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health for an update on the provision of the new renal unit at the Causeway Hospital. (AQW 2298/17-22)

Mr Swann: In 2015 a Strategic Outline Case for the development of renal services at Causeway Hospital was approved. This allowed the Northern Trust to develop an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the project.

The OBC was submitted to the Department for review in February 2017.

A significant increase in revenue cost to provide this service was identified in the business case. As neither the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) nor the Trust were in a position to meet the increase in revenue costs the project was deemed unaffordable. The scheme was placed on hold in November 2017.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health to detail any meetings that his Department has had with the Department for Infrastructure, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency, since October 2019, regarding the provision of suicide prevention barriers on bridges in North Belfast. (AQW 2301/17-22)

Mr Swann: Officials met with representatives from Department for Infrastructure and the Public Health Agency at a workshop on 27 November 2019 to discuss Creative Approaches to Improving Wellbeing along the Westlink Corridor. We will continue to work in partnership to address this issue.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many medical legal claims have been made against each Health and Social Care Trust, over the last two years. (AQW 2322/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is assumed that these questions refer to clinical / social care negligence cases. Information on clinical / social care negligence cases in Northern Ireland, including the number of new cases opened and the amount paid is published annually by the Department, and is available to view or download from:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/cscnc-ni-18-19.pdf>

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how much compensation has been paid by each Health and Social Care Trust for medical negligence claims, over the last two years. (AQW 2323/17-22)

Mr Swann: It is assumed that these questions refer to clinical / social care negligence cases. Information on clinical / social care negligence cases in Northern Ireland, including the number of new cases opened and the amount paid is published annually by the Department, and is available to view or download from:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/cscnc-ni-18-19.pdf>

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health what has been the cost to each Health and Social Care Trust for storage of medical records at outside facilities, over the last two years. (AQW 2324/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Trusts make use of a regional contract covering offsite storage of patient and administrative records, the scanning of documents, the transportation of records to nominated locations and secure disposal of records. It is not possible to disaggregate these costs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how much has been spent on taxi hire by each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last two years.

(AQW 2325/17-22)

Mr Swann: Expenditure on taxi hire by each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last two financial years, is set out in the table below.

	2018/19 £	2017/18 £
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	1,490,000	1,372,000
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	1,923,000	1,507,000
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	1,289,240	1,161,454
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	1,495,000	1,411,000
Western Health and Social Care Trust	601,476	420,283
NI Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust	223,597	284,168
Total	7,022,313	6,155,905

* Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

The use of taxis by HSC Trusts is planned and monitored, and taxis are only used in exceptional circumstances when it is not economically viable or appropriate to use Trust transport.

Taxis are used by Trusts for a variety of reasons. Most of the expenditure is incurred on the transport of vulnerable patients and clients, particularly children in care and adults with a physical or learning disability.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how much each Health and Social Care Trust has paid to outside agencies to provide nursing staff over the last two year period.

(AQW 2326/17-22)

Mr Swann: HSC Trusts employ locum staff for several reasons, for example, cover for sickness and maternity/paternity leave; cover for existing vacancies; and when demand increases over the winter months. The primary aim of this is to ensure that safe and effective services are sustained at all times for patients and clients.

The Department monitors expenditure on agency/locum staff and bank staff on a quarterly basis, for specific staffing categories, across financial years. Expenditure on outside agencies for nursing staff by Health and Social Care Trust, for the last two financial years, is given below;

Nurse Agency Spend over the last 2 Financial Years

Trust	2017/18	2018/19
BHSCT	£12,529,388	£19,231,230
NHSCT	£9,153,695	£11,028,899
SEHSCT	£3,144,583	£3,904,493
SHSCT	£3,758,100	£10,843,948
WHSCT	£3,571,683	£7,062,151
NIAS	£5,440	£1,020
Total Spend	£32,162,889	£52,071,741

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health to outline any measures taken, or future plans, to raise awareness of the mental health problems associated with problem gambling and gambling addiction.

(AQW 2333/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have no current plans to commission any media or advertising campaigns on raising awareness of gambling addictions.

However, the Department for Communities launched a consultation on the Regulation of Gambling in Northern Ireland on 16 December 2019. The consultation asks for views on whether the gambling industry should help fund research, education and the treatment of problem gamblers; it also asks for views on the imposition of a statutory levy.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount of funding received from care homes, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2348/17-22)

Mr Swann: The total costs funded by each Health and Social Care Trust in relation to independent residential and nursing care homes are only readily available up to 2017/18 and are set out in the table below.

	2017/18 £m	2016/17 £m	2015/16 £m
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	50	47	57
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	73	66	63
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	53	51	51
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	51	49	50
Western Health and Social Care Trust	44	41	44
Total	271	254	266

* Source: Trust Financial Returns

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of cancer patients who attended accident and emergency departments, broken down by hospital, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2350/17-22)

Mr Swann: Information on the number of cancer patients who attend emergency departments (EDs) is not available.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to detail his Department's plans for the future of Roddens Residential Home, Ballymoney.

(AQW 2369/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Roddens Residential Home currently provides a range of interventions to service users in the Northern Trust including recovery/rehabilitation, short breaks and residential care.

There has been no decision taken on any future plans for Roddens Residential Home.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health how he plans to address the (i) inadequate number of GPs; and (ii) high rate of attrition from the GP workforce.

(AQW 2382/17-22)

Mr Swann:

- i A General Practitioner (GP) Medical Workforce Review led by the Public Health Agency was published in June 2015. In line with the recommendations of that Review, the number of GP training places commissioned annually by my Department has been increased by 71%, from 65 in 2015 to 111 in 2019.
- ii. My Department continues to work closely with the Health and Social Care Board and GP representatives to develop initiatives that underpin the sustainability of GP services in Northern Ireland. The GP Induction and Refresher Scheme supports GPs returning to or entering clinical practice. The GP Retainer Scheme assists in the retention of GPs in primary care.

The ongoing roll-out of Multi-Disciplinary Teams is also delivering new capacity and innovation into primary care.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health to outline his plans for building capacity in general practice to support the rollout of multi-disciplinary teams in line with the Executive's commitments in New Decade, New Approach; and what support will be given to GP practices to ensure their premises are modernised and ready for the rollout.

(AQW 2383/17-22)

Mr Swann: The rollout of primary care multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) is currently progressing in five out of the 17 GP Federations across the province, one in each Trust area.

Under the terms of the New Decade New Approach Agreement, the Executive has committed to extending the MDT to cover a further 100,000 people. I will be working my colleagues across the Executive to ensure that sufficient resources are made available for this work.

Once the necessary resources are in place I will make a decision on the location for the further roll out.

To support implementation, for each MDT, project staff are recruited to ensure delivery capacity is available in the relevant GP Federation. Additional support is provided at a regional level by officials from my Department and the HSCB to assist with this process.

As part of the wider programme of capital investment in primary care, more than £5m in capital grants has been invested in individual GP practices to support delivery of MDTs.

MDTs are a cornerstone of our plans to reform the Health Service, delivering much needed change and innovation directly to the community. I am committed to ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to support this.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health how many children in each Health and Social Care Trust were referred for queried ADHD in each year since 2016/17.

(AQW 2389/17-22)

Mr Swann: The number of children referred for queried Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) in each year since 2016/17, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: The number of children referred for queried ADHD in each Health and Social Care Trust (2016/17 - 2018/19)

Health and Social Care Trust	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Belfast	356	498	529
Northern1	657	576	692
South Eastern	544	589	746
Southern2	N/A	389	464
Western	254	255	230
Northern Ireland	-	2307	2661

- 1 The figures for the Northern Trust are the number of children referred to the ADHD Behaviour Assessment Service (BAS) for ADHD assessment.
- 2 The 2016/17 figures for the Southern Trust have not been provided as this would require an extensive manual trawl through files, and therefore could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health what is the average waiting time in each Health and Social Care Trust from referral to assessment for children with queried ADHD.

(AQW 2390/17-22)

Mr Swann: There is no regional strategy in place for ADHD and HSC Trusts have different pathways for ADHD referrals. Waiting time figures from referral to assessment for queried ADHD is therefore held in different formats within each Trust and cannot be reported in a consistent way. The waiting times figures are set out in Tables 1-3 below.

Table 1: The current estimated waiting time from referral to assessment for children with queried ADHD for a routine ADHD appointment (28th February 2020)

Health and Social Care Trust	Estimated waiting time for a routine ADHD appointment
Belfast	168 weeks

Table 2: The average waiting time from referral to assessment for children with queried ADHD (Year ending 31 March 2019)

Health and Social Care Trust	Average wait from referral to assessment for children with queried ADHD
Northern	8.3 weeks
South Eastern ¹	65 to 78 weeks

- 1 The South Eastern HSC Trust has three different sectors for ADHD referrals and average waiting time depends on the sector.

Table 3: The waiting times from referral for an assessment for children with queried ADHD at 31 January 2020.

Active waits from referral date for an assessment for children with queried ADHD	Southern HSC Trust		Western HSC Trust	
	N	%	N	%
0-3 weeks	29	19	9	2
>3 to 6 weeks	16	11	7	1
>6 to 9 weeks	31	21	12	2
>9 to 13 weeks	21	14	17	3
> 13 to 18 weeks	15	10	24	5
> 18 to 26 weeks	23	15	25	5
> 26 to 39 weeks	16	11	70	13
> 39 to 52 weeks	0	0	61	12
> 52 weeks	0	0	299	57
Total	151	101	524	100

Note: The information provided from the Southern and Western HSC Trusts is not in the average wait time format because this could only be obtained through a manual trawl of hundreds of files, and therefore can only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health what alternatives to medication, such as support interventions, including duration of service, are offered to children with ADHD or their parents in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 2391/17-22)

Mr Swann: Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and their families are offered a range of post diagnostic support interventions in most of the Health and Social Care Trusts, which may include one to one, group work and/or parenting programmes following diagnosis.

Health and Social Care Trusts will signpost parents and children to relevant statutory and voluntary agencies, such as CAMHS and ADD-NI, to provide further support services for children and young people affected by ADHD and their families.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many ambulances have been involved in road traffic accidents over the last five years.
(AQW 2393/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) report that from 1st February 2015 to 31st January 2020, 294 ambulance vehicles have been involved in 852 road traffic accidents. This includes 3rd party accidents, NIAS fault accidents and accidents reported where no damage occurred.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how much each Health and Social Care Trust has paid for the use of bank nursing staff over the last two year period.
(AQW 2396/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Department monitors expenditure on bank staff on a quarterly basis, for specific staffing categories, across financial years. Expenditure on bank nursing staff by Health and Social Care Trust, for the last two financial years, is given below;

Nurse Bank Spend over the last 2 Financial Years

Trust	2017/18	2018/19
BHSCT	£18,274,615	£20,651,713
NHSCT	£9,405,574	£10,741,530
SEHSCT	£11,462,595	£13,346,080
SHSCT	£9,838,329	£11,545,194
WHSCT	£5,995,173	£6,625,702
NIAS	£0	£0
Total Spend	£54,976,286	£62,910,219

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health whether he will make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer around personal taxation rules that are discouraging medical practitioners from taking on additional duties, such as working in GP out of hours services.

(AQW 2400/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am very conscious of the impacts these taxation rules are having across the health service. A joint letter from my Executive colleague Conor Murphy, the Minister for Finance, and myself has now issued to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about this matter.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the early success of the pilot schemes of the multi-disciplinary team model for general practice.

(AQW 2401/17-22)

Mr Swann: I am pleased to note the successful roll out of primary care multi-disciplinary teams in the Down, Londonderry, West Belfast, Newry and District and Causeway GP Federation areas.

I am fully committed to the roll out of the model during 2020/21, alongside bringing the model to another 100k people as per the commitment in 'New Decade, New Approach'. This will see over a third of GP practices and their patient populations covered by the model.

Early indications are that benefits of the MDT model are already being experienced in the roll out areas. For example, GPs are providing positive informal feedback around the range of new treatment options now available to their patients when they previously had no alternatives to prescription medication.

A reduction has been seen in re-attendance and prescribing, and pressure on GP time has been reduced. Initial, un-validated, statistics in relation to physiotherapy roles have indicated that there has been a reduction in the number of referrals to secondary care and diagnostic services, while another site was able to demonstrate a small reduction in the number of analgesic prescriptions.

Within the Londonderry area, a patient experience survey is being carried out on a rolling basis. For the most recent period available (social work and physiotherapy only) all patients were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received, and would recommend the service to others.

Qualitative feedback has provided further insights, with respondents commenting on timeliness and ease of access, along with the supportive and professional manner of the team members.

A contract to procure a robust evaluation of the MDT model using an action learning approach which will help improve the model as it progresses, has now concluded, with the contract awarded on 18 February 2020.

This evaluation will provide a comprehensive ongoing and final assessment of the overall quality of the model in terms of the approach, relevance and sustainability and the extent to which the services provided through the MDT model improve outcomes for individuals, families, carers etc.

An assessment of the key lessons that can inform future work in this area, including key success factors, strengths and areas for development, is also to be included along with recommendations for implementation of the MDT model on a wider basis across Northern Ireland.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health what percentage of medical graduates leave Northern Ireland to practice immediately, or soon after, they qualify; and whether any consideration has been given to creating an incentive scheme to help encourage them to remain in Northern Ireland to practice.

(AQW 2402/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Medical Student Places Review published by the Department in January 2019 established that, over the period 2012 to 2017, 86% of the Northern Ireland domiciles graduating from the QUB Medical School remained in Northern Ireland to commence their Foundation training. However, the destination either immediately or soon after, of the remaining graduates is difficult to determine precisely.

Action 2 of the health and social care Workforce Strategy is at an early stage of development. This action envisages the exploration and establishment of non-salary incentive schemes as a means of recruiting and/or retaining people and/or dealing with pressures in less popular specialties and locations.

For medical graduates, a short-term working group, the Strategic Group to Enhance the Quality of Medical Education in Northern Ireland, has been established by my Department under Action 2 to develop, collectively with medical leaders across the HSC, a system-wide approach to raise the quality of HSC's "medical education offer", including the development of measures to increase the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a destination of choice for medical training and careers. This group is due to report within several months.

Further, Action 2 allows for the development of a return on service obligations policy, which would establish a new two-way commitment between HSC employers and trainees. This is currently being scoped.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how much has been spent on private ambulances in each of the last five years.
(AQW 2414/17-22)

Mr Swann: Expenditure on private ambulances in each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

2018/19 £	2017/18 £	2016/17 £	2015/16 £	2014/15 £
5,509,065	4,496,684	3,552,450	3,073,552	2,205,040

* Please note that the use of private ambulance has been interpreted as the use of independent ambulance providers to support non-emergency transportation of patients within the emergency and non-emergency environments.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the impact restricted access to unskilled migrant workers will have on the Health Service, in relation to the Prime Minister's proposals for visa controls.
(AQW 2421/17-22)

Mr Swann: I understand that the United Kingdom Government's proposed points-based immigration system will have an impact on access to lower skilled workers from outside the United Kingdom and Ireland for the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to provide a definitive assessment at this time of the impact on health and social care staff numbers, or on the potential for vacancies as a result, but my Department will be assessing the likely impacts and liaising with other Departments, and across the HSC, as the implementation date of any new system approaches.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health how many General Practitioners (full time equivalents) were employed by his Department in each of the last five years.
(AQW 2424/17-22)

Mr Swann: In the main General Practitioners are independent contractors. Data on numbers of General Practitioners in Northern Ireland are published annually on the Business Services Organisation (BSO) website at the following link: <http://www.hsrbusiness.hscni.net/services/2998.htm>.

Information on the whole time equivalent of General Practitioners is not recorded.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health how his Department will address the shortage of epinephrine autoinjectors.
(AQW 2426/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Department is aware of ongoing issues affecting the supply of some brands of epinephrine auto-injectors throughout the UK due to manufacturing issues. However, supplies of auto-injectors are still available. Patients experiencing difficulties in getting a particular brand of epinephrine auto-injector on prescription are advised to consult with their GP who will be able to advise them about alternative options.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to detail the average waiting time for a non-urgent GP appointment within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, for each of the past twelve months.
(AQW 2452/17-22)

Mr Swann: This information is not available. As independent contractors, GP practices are responsible for managing their own appointment systems and waiting times.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Health whether there has been an increase in the commissioning of private supported living services by health and social care trusts; and whether the reduction of Supporting People funding has had an impact on commissioning of these services.
(AQW 2455/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Trusts do not commission private supported living services. These services are commissioned and funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

As per AQW 2219/17-22, a review of joint funding arrangements is currently being established and will be overseen by the Supporting People Programme Board chaired by Department for Communities (DfC) and on which my Department is represented. Private-supported living services are not within the scope of this review.

My Department, with the HSCB, is working with the DfC on identifying current and future housing and support needs of people with disabilities to help inform the NIHE planning process. This includes capital refurbishment and rebuild on a number of existing schemes under Supporting People as well as seeking to progress a number of new special needs housing services for adults with a learning disability. The HSC Trusts fund social care and rehabilitation services in jointly funded schemes that offer tenancies for people with disabilities.

Providers of HSC funded care and support services to people in their own homes are required to be registered with the RQIA as a domiciliary care provider and are regulated on this basis.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Health how much has been spent by Health and Social Care Trusts on private-supported living services in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2456/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Trusts do not commission private supported living services. These services are commissioned and funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

As per AQW 2219/17-22, a review of joint funding arrangements is currently being established and will be overseen by the Supporting People Programme Board chaired by Department for Communities (DfC) and on which my Department is represented. Private-supported living services are not within the scope of this review.

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Providers of HSC funded care and support services to people in their own homes are required to be registered with the RQIA as a domiciliary care provider and are regulated on this basis.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of private-supported living services value for money in comparison with supported living services jointly commissioned through the Supporting People programme.

(AQW 2457/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Trusts do not commission private supported living services. These services are commissioned and funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

As per AQW 2219/17-22, a review of joint funding arrangements is currently being established and will be overseen by the Supporting People Programme Board chaired by Department for Communities (DfC) and on which my Department is represented. Private-supported living services are not within the scope of this review.

My Department, with the HSCB, is working with the DfC on identifying current and future housing and support needs of people with disabilities to help inform the NIHE planning process. This includes capital refurbishment and rebuild on a number of existing schemes under Supporting People as well as seeking to progress a number of new special needs housing services for adults with a learning disability. The HSC Trusts fund social care and rehabilitation services in jointly funded schemes that offer tenancies for people with disabilities.

Providers of HSC funded care and support services to people in their own homes are required to be registered with the RQIA as a domiciliary care provider and are regulated on this basis.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Health to outline any work with the Department of Communities to ensure that people with care and support needs have the same access to appropriate social housing as able-bodied people.

(AQW 2458/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Trusts do not commission private supported living services. These services are commissioned and funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

As per AQW 2219/17-22, a review of joint funding arrangements is currently being established and will be overseen by the Supporting People Programme Board chaired by Department for Communities (DfC) and on which my Department is represented. Private-supported living services are not within the scope of this review.

My Department, with the HSCB, is working with the DfC on identifying current and future housing and support needs of people with disabilities to help inform the NIHE planning process. This includes capital refurbishment and rebuild on a number of existing schemes under Supporting People as well as seeking to progress a number of new special needs housing services for adults with a learning disability. The HSC Trusts fund social care and rehabilitation services in jointly funded schemes that offer tenancies for people with disabilities.

Providers of HSC funded care and support services to people in their own homes are required to be registered with the RQIA as a domiciliary care provider and are regulated on this basis.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the adequacy of the regulation and oversight of private-supported living services commissioned by health and social care trusts, especially in comparison with supported living services jointly commissioned through the Supporting People programme.

(AQW 2459/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Health and Social Care Trusts do not commission private supported living services. These services are commissioned and funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

As per AQW 2219/17-22, a review of joint funding arrangements is currently being established and will be overseen by the Supporting People Programme Board chaired by Department for Communities (DfC) and on which my Department is represented. Private-supported living services are not within the scope of this review.

My Department, with the HSCB, is working with the DfC on identifying current and future housing and support needs of people with disabilities to help inform the NIHE planning process. This includes capital refurbishment and rebuild on a number of existing schemes under Supporting People as well as seeking to progress a number of new special needs housing services for adults with a learning disability. The HSC Trusts fund social care and rehabilitation services in jointly funded schemes that offer tenancies for people with disabilities.

Providers of HSC funded care and support services to people in their own homes are required to be registered with the RQIA as a domiciliary care provider and are regulated on this basis.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health whether he will consider asking the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to keep records of incidents where emergency services are obstructed by parked cars in the course of attending to an incident, with a view to recorded statistics helping to build a picture of where such problems are most pressing.

(AQW 2462/17-22)

Mr Swann: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service do not separately record information relating to parked cars causing an obstruction whilst attending an incident. Given the disparate nature of calls and the variations in obstructions, there would be limited benefit to collating this information.

When persistent problematic parking is identified, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service directly engage with local communities and other stakeholders to mitigate the problem.

Ms Sheerin asked the Minister of Health whether he will give a direction to Health and Social Care Trusts for a change to the criteria for Trust-provided night sits, in order to ensure that people suffering from loneliness or with mental health conditions qualify for this help.

(AQW 2467/17-22)

Mr Swann: Domiciliary care including the provision of night sits is governed by the 2008 DHSSPS Circular: Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care.

The purpose of this circular is to provide a framework for a consistent approach to eligibility and fairer access to domiciliary care services.

Anyone with a presenting problem which might feasibly be met by a community care service is entitled to an assessment to an appropriate degree by the relevant Health and Social Care Trust.

The criteria do not exclude or include specific conditions or problems such as loneliness and mental health conditions. Rather, they assess the risk that a presenting problem may have on someone's ability to live independently. If the assessment shows a critical or substantial risk to independence and help cannot be sourced elsewhere, the person will be considered eligible for an appropriate service.

Trusts may also offer a variety of other supports, depending on their available resources, to those people falling outside these criteria. Responses to loneliness and mental health problems may be most appropriately met by other types of services such as social activities, counselling, information and advice. Trusts may provide these services themselves or contract with others to provide these. These services are also sometimes available to anyone without the need for a Health and Social Care Trust intervention.

There are also a number of other initiatives ongoing which seek to support people in these areas:

- The rollout of multi-disciplinary teams in primary care services includes support for people with mental health problems and for people experiencing loneliness.
- The Protect Life 2 Strategy also supports initiatives designed to combat loneliness.
- The Reform of Adult Social Care process includes proposals to develop preventative and citizen-focused community support models that promote social wellbeing and connect people to supportive social networks and communities.
- Delivering Together also promoted the expansion of community development approaches with the production of a framework in 2018 and the setting up of an Implementation and Innovation Board to take the work forward. Community development approaches are important in providing community responses to loneliness and mental health problems.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future of stroke services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2582/17-22)

Mr Swann: My Department's consultation document 'Reshaping Stroke Care – Saving Lives, Reducing Disability' outlined commitments to deliver improvements across stroke services. Over 6,000 individual responses were received from the Western Trust area.

Given the complexity of the issues involved, I intend to take some time to consider the consultation analysis, the evidence available and the views of all those who responded before deciding on the way forward. I will, of course, update the House in due course.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health (i) for an update on his Department's involvement with the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review into mesh; (ii) whether he intends to introduce a database and registry on mesh following this review, similar to that which will be rolled out in Britain; and (iii) if so, when the database will be introduced.

(AQW 2625/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Independent Medicines and Medical Device Safety review is an independent review commissioned by the Secretary of State for Health with a focus on the NHS in England. As such my Department has had no involvement with the review. My department did, however, write to the Secretary of State requesting that consideration be given during the review for patients in Northern Ireland to submit their evidence on the relevant areas to the review team. . Subsequently the review team did visit NI and had a public meetings for submission for evidence.

The Department will consider any recommendations arising from the review to improve our handling of patient concerns surrounding the safety of medicines and medical devices.

A database and registry for vaginal mesh surgical devices is one of a number of conditions that must be in place before the current restriction of use on vaginal mesh in surgery can be lifted.

My Department, along with colleagues in Scotland and Wales are currently engaging with NHS-Digital, the organisation that is developing the registry in England, with the intention that the registry and database that is rolled out will be available for use by the devolved administrations on a UK wide basis.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health when he will answer AQW 2463/17-22.

(AQW 2769/17-22)

Mr Swann: The answer to AQW 2463/17-22 was provided to you on Thursday 27 February 2020.

Ms Flynn asked the Minister of Health to list the community and voluntary groups in West Belfast that receive suicide prevention funding from the Public Health Agency.

(AQW 2778/17-22)

Mr Swann: The community and voluntary groups in West Belfast that receive suicide prevention funding from the Public Health Agency are:

Group

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ■ Aware | ■ Albert Street Community Centre |
| ■ Barnardos | ■ Rainbow Project |
| ■ Falls Women's Centre | ■ Holy Trinity Centre |
| ■ Extern | ■ SESCT/New Colin Counselling |
| ■ Holy Trinity Counselling | ■ Suicide Awareness Support Group |
| ■ Lenadoon Counselling Service | |

Residents of West Belfast and Colin also have access to a wide range of city and region-wide services. These are available at: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing>.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the closure of Ravehill Nursing Home in Carrickfergus; and what action his Department is taking in relation to the closure.

(AQW 2955/17-22)

Mr Swann: The Northern Trust has taken the lead in ensuring that suitable alternative accommodation is found quickly for all current residents and that their relatives are kept informed.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health how the closure of Ravenhill Nursing Home in Carrickfergus will impact the capacity of available places in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3045/17-22)

Mr Swann: At this stage the Northern Trust is confident that provision can be found for all residents who want to stay in the local area to do so.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all departmental budgetary pressures.
(AQW 420/17-22)

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): My budgetary pressures going forward are as follows:

Resource pressures

£ millions	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
NIW (incl rates)	7	19	23
Transport	29	29	29
Roads & Rivers	20	26	30
Department and Pay-Related	5	6	8
Total Department	61	80	90

Capital Requirement

£ millions	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Requirement	795	1,090	1,409

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure, over the last five years, (i) how much funding has been promised by the Dublin government to support infrastructure projects in Northern Ireland, broken down by project; and (ii) how much has been received for each project.

(AQW 504/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- i. The Irish Government confirmed a revised £75m contribution for the A5 in 2015.
- ii. DfI has not requested funding from the Irish Government in the last 5 years due to delays in project progression.
- iii. In the New Decade New Approach (DNA) document, the Irish Government has refreshed its commitment to contribute £75m over three years toward construction of the A5 up to 2022.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) what legislation must be amended in order to extend, by one year, the age when a light vehicle is required to have its first MOT; and (ii) her assessment of the minimum time that it would take to enact such legislation.

(AQW 1074/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Light vehicles can encompass private vehicles and light goods vehicles less than 3.5 tonnes. The timing of the first MOT test is set out in the Road Traffic Northern Ireland Order 1995 which aligns with the requirements of EU Directive 2014/45 that requires a first roadworthiness test within 4 years from the date on which the vehicle was first registered.

In NI light goods vehicles must be tested within 3 years of first registration, this could be extended by 1 year by amending the legislation and I am considering this. However, at this time I am unable to provide details of a possible timescale.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much of the £1.8m released by the Department of Finance in the January monitoring round will be used to repair street lights currently not working.

(AQW 1214/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand and share the concerns of the public affected by street light outages and am working with my Departmental officials to address this issue as quickly as possible.

The £1.8m allocation was ringfenced to replace dangerous street lighting columns rather than repair outages. I have, however, recently allocated £1.2m to address the current outage backlog and future outages up to 31 March 2020.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance as part of the 2020/21 budget discussions in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether any of the £2.8m made available through the latest monitoring round for street lighting and winter services will be allocated to replace broken street light columns in the Creggan area, Derry.

(AQW 1248/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand and share the concerns of the public affected by street light outages. Unfortunately, because of severe budget cuts, my Department had to restrict the street lighting maintenance service across Northern Ireland. As a result, outages were taking longer than usual, and much longer than I would like, to be repaired.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Finance Minister, in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I am pleased that this need has been recognised and welcome the recent additional allocation made to my Department. I am keen to allocate all available funding, after fully funding the winter gritting services up to 31 March, to fix broken Street Lights and improve road surfaces across the entire road network, including the Creggan area of Derry.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) when was the Dunore Point Water Treatment Works sold to Dalriada; and (ii) when was it bought back by NI Water.

(AQW 1274/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) On 30 May 2006 the Department for Regional Development appointed Dalriada Water Limited to design, build and operate four Water Treatment Works (including Dunore Point Water Treatment Works) under the Project Alpha Public Private Partnership ("PPP")
- (ii) On 20 November 2017 NI Water acquired the Project Alpha PPP (including Dunore Point Water Treatment Works.)

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline plans to resurface Tower Park, Conlig.

(AQW 1353/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department currently has no plans to carry out resurfacing at Tower Park, Conlig. The road will, however, continue to be subject to monitoring during periodic inspections and may be included in a future work programme. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, urgent street lights and roads repairs. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of resurfacing plans among other pressures in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) locations in (a) Carrickfergus; (b) Larne; and (c) Newtownabbey which are suffering repeated sewerage blockages as a result of inappropriate materials being put into the sewerage system; and (ii) the cost of clearing blockages.

(AQW 1467/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) A list of repeat blockage locations in the Carrickfergus; Larne; and Newtownabbey locations, during the January through September 2019 period, is provided in the Table below. For data protection reasons only streets with five or more incidents have been included.

Carrickfergus:

No Incidents	Location	DA Name
5	Joymount, Carrickfergus, BT38 7DN	Carrickfergus DA
5	Salia Avenue, Carrickfergus, BT38 8NG	Carrickfergus DA
6	Woodlawn Avenue, Carrickfergus, BT38 8PP	Carrickfergus DA
7	Castlemara Drive, Carrickfergus, BT38 7RJ	Carrickfergus DA
5	Glenview, Carrickfergus, BT38 7RP	Carrickfergus DA
5	Beech Drive, Carrickfergus, BT38 8EA	Carrickfergus DA
5	Hawthorn Avenue, Carrickfergus, BT38 8EQ	Carrickfergus DA
6	Hawthorn Grove, Carrickfergus, BT38 8EG	Carrickfergus DA
6	Oakwood Road, Carrickfergus, BT38 8EU	Carrickfergus DA
6	Burleigh Drive, Carrickfergus, BT38 8HW	Carrickfergus DA
7	Larne Road, Carrickfergus, BT38 7NL	Carrickfergus DA
5	Sandes Court, Carrickfergus, BT38 8LE	Carrickfergus DA

No Incidents	Location	DA Name
7	Larne Road, Carrickfergus, BT38 7NL	Carrickfergus DA
5	Marshallstown Road, Carrickfergus, BT38 9DE	Carrickfergus DA
8	Glassillan Grove, Carrickfergus, BT38 8TE	Greenisland DA

Newtownabbey:

No Incidents	Location	DA Name
6	Greenvale Drive, Antrim, BT41 1SX	Antrim DA
5	Narvik Drive, Antrim, BT41 4LN	Antrim DA
5	Mill House Avenue, Antrim, BT41 2UZ	Antrim DA
5	Parklands, Antrim, BT41 4NH	Antrim DA
10	Rathglynn, Antrim, BT41 1LB	Antrim DA
5	The Meadow, Antrim, BT41 1EZ	Antrim DA
5	Mill House Close, Antrim, BT41 2WD	Antrim DA
5	Castle Park, Antrim, BT41 4LT	Antrim DA
5	Mallusk Gardens, Antrim, BT41 1BA	Antrim DA
7	Firfields, Antrim, BT41 4DL	Antrim DA
6	Greenvale Drive, Antrim, BT41 1SX	Antrim DA
7	Matapan Avenue, Antrim, BT41 4LR	Antrim DA
6	Rathmena Drive, Ballyclare, BT39 9HZ	Ballyclare DA
9	Wesleydale, , BT39 9WD	Ballyclare DA
7	Erskine Park, Ballyclare, BT39 9DA	Ballyclare DA
6	Trenchill Road, Ballyclare, BT39 9SJ	Ballyclare DA
5	Mill Road, Ballyclare, BT39 9DZ	Ballyclare DA
5	Erskine Park, Ballyclare, BT39 9DB	Ballyclare DA
5	Grange Valley Green, Ballyclare, BT39 9HD	Ballyclare DA
8	Whitewell Road, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NP	Whitehouse DA
8	Ballyclare Road, Newtownabbey, BT36 5JP	Whitehouse DA
8	Cashel Drive, Newtownabbey, BT37 0EY	Whitehouse DA
8	Kylemore Bend, Newtownabbey, BT37 9JP	Whitehouse DA
8	Inniscarn Drive, Newtownabbey, BT37 9JU	Whitehouse DA
9	Crossreagh Drive, Newtownabbey, BT37 9DY	Whitehouse DA
9	Milewater Close, Newtownabbey, BT36 5SN	Whitehouse DA

Larne:

No Incidents	Location	DA Name
5	West Street, Ballycarry, BT38 9HR	Ballystrudder DA
5	Cairnhill Crescent, Ballygalley, BT40 2QT	Larne DA
5	Sallagh Park Central, Larne, BT40 1NU	Larne DA
5	Loran Walk, Larne, BT40 2DH	Larne DA
5	Fairway, Larne, BT40 2BB	Larne DA
5	Loran Crescent, Larne, BT40 2DQ	Larne DA

- (ii) For the nine months from January to September 2019, there were a total 1126 reported sewer blockages dealt with by the appointed NI Water contractor in the Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey Borough Council areas. Based on the identified numbers of blockages at repeat locations, the estimated contractual costs for that period are approximately £41k. This sum does not include NI Water's additional costs associated with call handling, contract management and in-house costs.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) the circumstances around the planning permission process for Knock Iveagh have been investigated; and (ii) Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council will be liable for any compensation payments if planning permission is revoked.

(AQW 1476/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Enforcement investigations, as well as a number of live planning applications, relating to the development at the Knock Iveagh site remain under investigation and consideration by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. Under the 2-tier planning system local councils are responsible for the proper administration and processing of their own planning and/or enforcement cases in the first instance. As these planning and enforcement matters are still under consideration, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further or speculate about the future outcome of any decision by the Council.

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has completed an audit of reservoirs.

(AQW 1566/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Following its legislative scrutiny of the Reservoirs Bill during 2014, the Executive's then Agriculture and Rural Development Committee proposed that an audit of reservoirs be carried out to inform their considerations of the proposed reservoirs legislative framework.

This audit was undertaken between June 2015 and April 2016 by the former Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Since then my Department has undertaken further work in this area, focusing on a number of reservoirs identified as being in poor or very poor condition. My Department appointed a specialist consultant reservoir engineer to further inspect these 26 reservoirs to identify which, if any, are at imminent risk and outline the essential interventions the managers of these reservoirs need to undertake. Reports on these reservoirs are being finalised and I hope to be in receipt of them in the coming weeks.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail future plans for road resurfacing schemes in Strabane town.

(AQW 1579/17-22)

Ms Mallon: It is anticipated the following schemes will be completed within the Strabane area before the end of the current financial year:

- A5 Great Northern Link, Strabane;
- A5 Victoria Road at Bready Corner;
- A5 Victoria Road at Grange Corner;
- C675 Kilclean Road, Castlederg; and
- C680 Carnkenny Road, Ardstraw.

Details of works being taken forward in 2020/21 can only be confirmed once the budget has been finalised and there has been time for consideration of priorities and what can be delivered within the available funding. I have raised the need for additional investment with the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues in order to support the delivery of future works and projects.

In addition, Derry City and Strabane District Council is progressing a public realm scheme, which encompasses significant improvement work to the road infrastructure within the town centre of Strabane. My officials are working closely with Derry City and Strabane District Council and other agencies, to ensure delivery of this scheme at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure why classic cars in Northern Ireland are not exempt from MOT, as is the case in the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 1681/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In 2014, the EU Commission published EU Directive 2014/45 (the EU Directive) which set out the standards for roadworthiness testing across the European Union. The EU Directive replaced the Directive 2009/40/EC and included a number of compulsory provisions which had implications for motor vehicle testing in Northern Ireland. These compulsory provisions were transposed into domestic legislation in May 2018.

As part of the EU Directive, Member States were authorised to exempt VHIs from roadworthiness testing if they are at least 30 years old, no longer in production and have not had substantial changes made to them. This was not a mandatory requirement of the EU Directive and was therefore not consulted upon at the same time as the compulsory provisions. Currently in NI, all vehicles manufactured before 1960 are exempt from roadworthiness testing.

In GB, the Department for Transport (DfT) consulted on proposals to exempt vehicles constructed or first registered more than 40 years ago, on a rolling basis, and which have not been substantially altered, from the annual roadworthiness testing (MOT Test). The legislation came into force on 20th May 2018 and applies in GB only. I am aware that this exemption has created disparity between the MOT testing regime in GB, and testing that is in place here.

A public consultation exercise was launched here on Wednesday 12 June 2019 ending on Friday 30 August 2019 seeking views on whether we should introduce the same exemption for historic vehicles. My officials are providing me with the background of this issue including an analysis of the consultation responses received which will help me decide how best to progress this policy.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to improve road safety for the large number of employees at (i) Moy Park; and (ii) Almac, Seagoe Industrial Estate.

(AQW 1816/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has carried out significant investigatory work on the proposed signalisation of the Moy Park and Almac staggered junction. However, the analysis concluded that the introduction of traffic signals would increase delay and queuing, particularly on the main B2 Seagoe Road, reduce junction performance and cause safety concerns, due to the potential for queues to extend to the M12 off slip.

The existing junction is operating within capacity and any queuing and delays occurring on the minor legs of the junction are of relatively short duration. Furthermore, the injury collision statistics from the PSNI do not indicate the location merits further investigation from a road safety perspective. Therefore my Department has no further plans to introduce additional engineering measures at this stage.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 568/17-22, to outline; (i) how long the procurement process has been ongoing for Moira train station; (ii) when the exercise is likely to be completed; and (iii) what additional capacity is intended for the site.

(AQW 1860/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) The first business case to build a new park & ride facility at Moira Station was approved by my Department in June 2016 but this could not proceed as negotiations to procure the land were unsuccessful. A new process was therefore undertaken and a new business case identifying a new site was received in October 2019.

The procurement process to appoint a main contractor cannot commence until full funding is secured, planning approval is obtained and the lands acquired. Translink is preparing a full Business Case for the project and once the land purchase has been finalised, it will be submitted to my Department for approval. Given the severe budget constraints under which my Department has operated over recent years many of our services are already under considerable pressure. Therefore I will be assessing the full range of pressures across my Department reflecting on my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade:

- (ii) "New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead before making any final decision on the timeframe for the completion of this project.
- (iii) It is expected that approximately 340 additional spaces will become available when the project is fully completed.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether planned legislation regarding electric bicycles will remove the requirement for (i) licensing; (ii) registration; and (iii) insurance.

(AQW 1929/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the current situation regarding the use of electrically assisted pedal cycles (EAPCs) in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly conscious of the difference with Britain and Ireland.

I announced on the 4 February that I have decided to bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove EAPCs from legislative scope which will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence, which under proposed revised legislation would no longer be required. I am also recommending that EAPC owners/riders should consider the need for insurance that covers areas such as damage, theft, personal injury and liability when the proposed legislative changes come into force.

I believe getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in order to alleviate capacity issues currently facing MOT centres, whether she would consider biennial vehicle testing for cars aged four to ten years old.

(AQW 1953/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current disruption to the vehicle testing services at the Driver and Vehicle Agency's (DVA's) test centres is not acceptable and I have worked to minimise the disruption and to return to a safe and fully operational testing service as quickly as possible. This has included the immediate issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates, extending the opening hours at DVA test centres and commissioning two independent reviews to provide me with expert advice on the next steps.

I have decided based on expert engineering, audit, procurement and legal advice, to place an order for 52 lifts through an accelerated production programme. The new lifts will begin to be installed from April, with all lifts to be in place by July. Until all lifts are replaced and fully operational, I will ensure that all vehicles continue to be provided with the necessary cover to allow them to remain on the road; either through the issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates (TEC) or a priority appointment with the DVA. Testing on heavy goods vehicles, buses and motorcycles is continuing as normal and priority appointments are being given to taxis, customers with four year old cars, and car dealerships.

While these steps will return our centres safely and swiftly to full operation, there is still more to do. This situation has brought to light the need to improve our MOT system and centres and I will be considering a range of options over the coming months. This includes considering legislative options regarding the approach and timeframes for testing.

The safety of all staff and customers is my priority. In ensuring safety, disruption has inevitably been caused to DVA customers.

I want to assure you that officials in the DVA are doing everything possible to resolve the issues as soon as possible and that I will continue to monitor this situation very carefully.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to enhance public transport services for blind and partially sighted people.

(AQW 2092/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department and Translink work closely with groups such as the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) to identify and address physical and non-physical barriers to public transport including for those who are blind and partially sighted.

This has informed the introduction of a range of measures over recent years. Translink welcomes guide dogs and other recognised assistance animals on all their services and stations. All bus drivers have been trained to stop the bus at a stop if there is a passenger waiting who may have difficulty identifying the service. Translink's timetables are available in large print, braille and audio. To build on this, a number of changes are also being introduced to Translink's website to ensure compatibility with main screen-reading browsers and voice technologies such as Alexa. In addition, Translink is preparing a business case for consideration by my Department in rolling out audio visual systems to the Ulsterbus network.

Ongoing, engagement with RNIB and IMTAC in the design and delivery of key projects such as the North West Multi-modal Hub and Belfast Rapid Transit has also resulted in a number of revisions to better meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people. This has included, for example, changes to the halt and vehicle design for Glider and revisions to the public realm and inclusion of a guide-dog spend area at the North West Multi-modal Hub. The success of this work can be demonstrated through the 25% increase of older people and people with disabilities using BRT as compared to the previous Metro routes that it serves.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her plans for the completion of resurfacing of the Moy Road, Portadown.

(AQW 2106/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Resurfacing works were completed last year on the B28 route. My Department currently has no plans to carry out further resurfacing on Moy Road, Portadown. The road will, however, continue to be subject to monitoring during periodic inspections and may be included in a future work programme. In the meantime, any actionable safety defects at this location will be noted for repair, in line with my Department's current maintenance guidelines.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Finance Minister, in order to maintain our roads to a better standard and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department. I welcome the additional allocation made to my Department for winter service, street light repairs and road patching. This money will help to begin to address the backlog. The extent of future resurfacing plans and other work programmes in my Department, will be determined by the forthcoming budget.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on improvements to be made on the footpath along the Derrymacash Road, Lurgan between the M1 Bridge, the GAA club and nearby housing estates.

(AQW 2108/17-22)

Ms Mallon: A footway exists between the M1 Bridge and the full extent of Derrymacash village on one or both sides of the carriageway.

In October 2019, an assessment was carried out to consider the provision of a new section of footway, between Raughlin Lane and the bus stop some 170 metres towards the village. However, it did not score highly enough under my Department's current assessment arrangements to merit further development. Given the pressures on my Department's budgets and the number of other schemes competing for inclusion within our Local Transport and Safety Measures works programme, it is therefore unlikely that further measures could be prioritised at this location at present.

While I would like to do more in relation to improving safety within our communities, the severe budget constraints that I have inherited, limit my capacity to do so. I have raised this issue with the Department of Finance and Executive colleagues, in advance of the new budget being set.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she would consider the installation of lights leading to and from the Wolfe Tones GAA club at Derrymacash Road, Lurgan.
(AQW 2109/17-22)

Ms Mallon: When considering the provision of street lighting in rural or semi-rural communities, such as the location at Derrymacash Road, Lurgan, my Department uses two main criteria which consider both personal and road safety issues: -

- If there are a minimum of ten dwellings within a contiguous length of 200 metres. Public buildings with significant night-time use equates to 2 properties under this criteria. There is no development at this location; and
- the accident and traffic data for the location must indicate that road lighting is a measure which would contribute to a reduction in the number of night-time collisions. There have been no reportable accidents recorded at this location.

My Department has to balance the demand for more rural lighting against the unwelcome effects of increased urbanisation of the countryside, the environmental impact of light pollution on people, wildlife and flora as well as the financial costs of providing and maintaining additional public lighting installations.

Unfortunately, I have to advise, this location does not meet the criteria for the installation of street lighting.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for her assessment of the Border Railways project in Scotland; and (ii) whether she would consider a similar project in the North West.
(AQW 2114/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) I am aware of the Border Railways project connecting Tweedbank and the Borders area with Edinburgh and the rest of the GB National Rail network. This project to reconstruct a 30-mile section of railway line last used in 1969 was completed in 2015. The cost of the project amounted to £294m over some 30 miles, and was funded by Transport Scotland. It has demonstrated positive social and economic benefits
- (ii) I am clear that the development of our rail network presents a unique opportunity to improve the sustainability of our transport operations. However, investment decisions need to include network optimisation in terms of operational and financial viability and examine its wider role in assisting the growth of the region.

I am committed to addressing regional imbalance and I am aware of the benefits economically and socially for our communities of an enhanced rail network. I will be exploring all options in line with the budgetary allocations.

I am currently developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTNTP) which will set out priorities for future development of the main road and rail networks to 2035. The Draft RSTNTP will be published for public consultation later this year.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Infrastructure how her Department will ensure that maps of available public land are digitised and made available to the Department for Communities.
(AQW 2150/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In January 2019, following NICS Board endorsement, the Department of Finance (DoF), with assistance from the Strategic Investment Board, set up the Government Land and Property Asset Register (GLPR) programme – to create a central asset database and register of all land and property assets, which government departments and their arms-length bodies currently own, lease, and license or have an interest in. LPS' Ordnance Survey NI (OSNI) division has been tasked with building and populating this asset database and developing two online viewing portals, one for the public with limited data (which is also released as open data on the OpenDataNI portal), and an internal portal for departmental asset managers to view each other's data.

I understand the first batch of data, including digitised maps, relating to land owned by the Department for Communities (DfC) will be released to the public over the next few months. Over the coming months, LPS will start engaging with other Departments, including my Department, to roll out the GLPR programme. In the meantime, my Department will continue to supply information to DfC's Public Land for Housing Project, relating to any DfC land or property declared surplus to requirements. This project is linked to the PfG target of "Improving the Supply of Suitable Housing".

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her plans for the completion of the A6 dualling from Dungiven to Castledawson.
(AQW 2167/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department is currently developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTNTP), which will set out my priorities for future development of the main road and rail networks to 2035.

There are two major A6 projects currently under construction which are providing around 40km of new dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson and between Derry and Dungiven. I will consider any proposals for improvements to the remaining single carriageway section of A6, as part of my new RSTNTP.

Once I have identified my preferred options and priorities, I will issue a draft plan for public consultation.

I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints however, I am committed to exploring all proposals that address regional imbalance and that connect our rural communities.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures are being taken to discourage or eliminate damaging transport options and to promote zero emissions in public and private transport.

(AQW 2170/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Infrastructure Minister, my focus will be on using available resources to green our infrastructure and deliver sustainable transport that connects people; unlocks our economic potential; protects our valuable environment; and improves health and well-being, for all our communities across Northern Ireland.

My Department is working closely with the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) on a broad range of funding streams to support the UK wide Road to Zero Ultra Low Emission Vehicle strategy which includes providing a range of grants towards the purchase of Electric Vehicles and home, workplace and residential charge points.

Funding has also been secured from the OLEV Hydrogen Transport fund which has provided support for the Hydrogen Refuelling Station and 3 Hydrogen Buses I recently announced would be included in the Translink fleet.

In addition I recognise the importance of having a modern, reliable public electric vehicle charging network which provides confidence for users of ultra-low emission vehicles. To help achieve this I recently announced a commitment from myself and the DAERA Minister for our two departments to work collaboratively to promote the use of EVs and improve the charge point network across the North.

I am committed to exploring all options to promote a modal shift in travel behaviour from reliance on the use of cars to walking, cycling and cleaner, greener, sustainable transport.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures are being taken to invest in zero emissions public transport infrastructure such as sustainable green transport hubs and corridors.

(AQW 2171/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have an ambitious vision for a low carbon future where we make low emission public transport accessible to people and communities across Northern Ireland. In line with that, Translink has developed a strategy aimed at moving to zero emission public transport operations by 2040. On bus this will be achieved by moving from the hybrid technology, as utilised on the Glider, to battery and Hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles. As a first step, Translink is trialling Hydrogen vehicles and battery electric vehicles. As part of this trial, Translink has recently engaged with Queens University in Belfast in order to conduct route modelling across its Belfast and Foyle Metro operations.

I am committed to developing new transport plans which deliver support for public transport, encourages more walking and cycling, better manages car commuting and promotes sustainable development all in an effort to improve the environment and people's lives. This reflects the ambitions of sustainable green transport hubs and corridors which aim to integrate land-use and transport planning to promote and enable modal shift to sustainable modes.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures are being taken to improve coordination between transport, spatial, land use and environmental planning to achieve net zero emissions.

(AQW 2172/17-22)

Ms Mallon: In terms of spatial and environmental planning, my officials engage with the local councils to assist them bringing forward their Local Development Plan (LDP) policies. They ensure that councils take account of the need to assess air quality and greenhouse gas outputs in accordance with the provisions of the Regional Development Strategy and Strategic Planning Policy Statement.

More especially in terms of integration of transport and land use planning, my officials are currently preparing a new suite of Transport Plans which take direct account of land use changes planned by the Councils in their LDPs. Each of the Transport Plans will consider alternative transport measures and assess their impacts against economic, social and environmental objectives including the improvement of local air quality and the minimisation of greenhouse gases.

I am committed to developing new transport plans which deliver support for public transport, encourages more walking and cycling, better manages car commuting and promotes sustainable development all in an effort to improve the environment and people's lives.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the current guidelines concerning advertisements on Translink buses and trains.

(AQW 2187/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Translink outsources the management of on-vehicle (both rail & bus) advertising and static advertising (within and on Translink property) to a specialist media contractor following an open tender process.

I can confirm that all advertisements arrangements must comply with regulations of the Advertising Standards Authority. In addition advertisement which are deemed to be prejudicial to the interests of Translink may also be rejected by its contractor.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail her Department's spend per head of population on cycling for each of the last five years; and the budget for cycling in 2020/21.

(AQW 2201/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department does not identify spend on walking and cycling separately but includes both in funding for active travel. It is also worth noting that the attribution of spend to active travel is not a precise exercise as some projects have benefits for active travel even if not carried out specifically for that purpose. Equally, there are cycling-related projects which have benefits for walking and other active travel modes additional to the cycling benefit. Finally, other Departments, Councils and other agencies may provide additional funding for walking and cycling promotion and infrastructure development.

Based on a Northern Ireland population of approximately 1.9 million the spend per head of population on walking and cycling by this Department in the last five years is set out below.

The higher figure in 2014/15 was as a result of the completion of a number of Active Travel Demonstration projects (including Belfast Bikes, Greenways in Derry and Craigavon and a cycling / walking bridge in Strabane).

- 2014/15 – £4.17
- 2015/16 – £1.51
- 2016/17 – £1.25
- 2017/18 – £1.52
- 2018/19 – £2.70

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether planning applications containing battery storage of electricity have to apply for hazardous substances consent.

(AQW 2214/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Whether or not hazardous substance consent is required is dependent on the provisions of the Planning (Hazardous Substance) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. These Regulations set out the circumstances when developers are required to submit an application for hazardous substance consent to the local council. Applications will be considered on a case by case basis.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the plans for Tillysburn Park and Ride.[R]

(AQW 2225/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Following a consultation on the proposed Tillysburn Park & Ride scheme in 2018, a number of issues were raised in relation to the access, traffic concerns and cycling provision. A revised layout is being prepared to address these concerns so the project could be progressed through the planning process. The proposal is part of the overall traffic management strategy for the York Street interchange project and aims to remove some of the private car trips from the road network and transfer these to public transport.

I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints, but I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland. I am currently assessing the pressures across my department reflecting on my priorities and the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach".

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will protect funding for the concessionary fare scheme.

(AQW 2236/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the multiple benefits delivered by the NI Concessionary Fares Scheme and am determined to preserve the travel discounts presently offered on public transport to the most vulnerable groups in society despite the severe constraints in my Department's budgets, however until the budget for 2020-21 is announced I cannot give an indication of what the funding for concessionary fares will be next year. However I am continuing to engage with my Executive colleagues to ensure sustained levels of recurrent funding going forward to maintain high quality public transport including support for concessionary travel. This is essential to maintain the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the region.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how the £3m allocated to her Department for meeting winter pressures will be spent.

(AQW 2240/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Following my representations to the Finance Minister, my Department secured an additional £3million of funding for Winter Service, urgent street lighting repairs and road maintenance. I have allocated £1m of this additional funding to provision of a winter service, £1.2m to urgent street lighting repairs and £0.8m to road maintenance.

In addition to this funding, my Department secured an additional £1million from January In Year Monitoring, to contribute to provision of a winter service.

Therefore, an additional £2million of funding has been recently secured to ensure my Department continues to deliver a full winter service to the end of the financial year, salting key routes, which carry 80% of traffic volumes.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much compensation was paid due to injuries caused by faulty or defective streetlights, from 2017.

(AQW 2243/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The NICS Accounting System does not record the cause of accidents/incidents that lead to compensation payments and for that reason, it is not possible to separately identify the amount of compensation paid in relation to faulty or defective street lights.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure what is the average waiting time to repair a pothole, from the date the pothole is reported to when it is repaired.

(AQW 2244/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 places a duty on my Department to maintain all public roads in reasonable condition. We fulfil this duty by complying with a set of Maintenance Standards for Safety. These standards are designed to ensure a consistent service level across the network and safe highways for all road users.

Our current standards specify a range of response times for the repair of defects, depending on factors such as their severity and the volume of traffic on the road. They range from one calendar day for the most serious defects, to periods of five working days and four weeks for less serious defects. The least serious defects only have to be repaired in the next work programme for that route. If it becomes apparent that the relevant response time cannot be met, then my Department has the option of installing signs to warn road users of a possible danger.

I can assure the Member following the allocation of funds for this financial year, I have directed officials to work to repair our roads as quickly as possible. Going forward, I have impressed on the Finance Minister the need to ensure further funding for the year 2020/2021 to ensure a backlog of repairs doesn't happen again.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to potholes, how much compensation was paid for (i) personal injuries; and (ii) damage caused to motor vehicles, from 2017.

(AQW 2245/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The NICS Accounting System does not record the cause of accidents/incidents that lead to compensation payments and for that reason, it is not possible to separately identify the amount of compensation paid in relation to potholes.

Compensation figures are provided in the table below for personal injury and vehicle damage claims settled in each financial year for the period requested for claims relating to all defects, including potholes, and other issues on the adopted road network. Please note that claims received in a financial year are not always concluded in the same financial year. Therefore, the figures include compensation paid for claims received in prior financial years.

Year	Claim Type		Total
	Personal Injury	Vehicle Damage	
2016-2017	£1,900,900.02	£319,100.01	£2,220,000.03
2017-2018	£1,277,106.51	£187,696.25	£1,464,802.76
2018-2019	£1,295,262.44	£850,280.96	£2,145,543.40
2019-2020 (up to 18/2/20)	£2,053,452.51	£385,805.35	£2,439,257.86
Total	£6,526,721.48	£1,742,882.57	£8,269,604.05

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all planned capital projects for Upper Bann.

(AQW 2257/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I will be assessing the pressures across my department reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. It is too early to comment on planned future capital projects in Upper Bann at this stage in the absence of future budget certainty.

There are a number of capital schemes currently under way including:

- A1 Junctions phase 2 project and planned traffic safety measures on roads across Upper Bann;
- a programme of works, costing approximately £10 million, being carried out by Translink to upgrade safety at Ulsterbus and Metro bus stations; bus engineering workshops; and bus parks. Craigavon and Banbridge bus engineering workshops and bus parks are included in this programme.

- Upper Bann will also benefit from the Capital Maintenance schemes through which NI Water will maintain its asset base such as Base Maintenance Programmes for Wastewater and Water Treatment Works; and Sewerage and Water Pumping Stations as well as Watermains and Sewer Rehabilitation schemes.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure why her Department did not use their powers, under Section 72 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, to revoke planning permission prior to the completion of a wind turbine on the historically scheduled site of Knock Iveagh.

(AQW 2261/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Following the transfer of planning powers to local councils in April 2015, any decision in relation to revocation or discontinuance in this case was and is a matter for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council in the first instance.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total amount spent on (i) pothole repair; and (ii) road resurfacing works in the South Antrim area in (a) 2017/18; (ii) 2018/19; and (iii) whether a projected final figure for 2019/20 financial year has been estimated.

(AQW 2277/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Expenditure information in the format requested, is not available. However, I can provide you with details of expenditure on Patching and Carriageway Resurfacing in my Department's Roads Northern Division, into which the bulk of the Assembly constituency of South Antrim is a constituent part:

Northern Division	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20 (forecast)
Patching	£2,735k	£3,365k	£1,236k
Carriageway Resurfacing	£8,535k	£16,610k	£17,407k

The higher spend in 2018/19 was required to address an increase in the number of potholes following the cold winter period in 2017/18. The increase in resurfacing expenditure from 2017/18 reflected additional capital funding available to support investment in the road network. Recognising the importance of investment in our infrastructure to improve connectivity, I will continue to make the case for adequate funding in future.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the timeline under which she proposes to bring the definition of electrically assisted pedal cycles in line with that in Great Britain.

(AQW 2279/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I announced on the 4 February that I will bring forward as soon as possible the necessary legislation which will remove the requirement for EAPCs to be registered and licensed. This will align with the position in Britain and Ireland. Current NI regulatory requirements include the need to register, license and insure EAPCs before use on public roads, and the rider must wear a helmet and hold a valid or full driving licence. In the case of insurance EAPC owners/riders should consider the need for insurance that covers areas such as damage, theft, personal injury and liability when the proposed legislative changes come into force.

Whilst I am unable to give a precise timeline under which the definition of EAPCs will be brought into line with that in Great Britain, I can, however, inform you that I have sent an outline of what the proposed legislative changes to EAPCs will entail to the DfI Committee for their consideration. Subject to a positive response my officials will make the necessary Affirmative Statutory Rule and arrange with the Assembly Business Office a date for a debate and vote by MLA colleagues on this legislative change.

It is my firm belief that getting more people to walk, cycle or use public transport for every day journeys will have huge benefits for all of us, cutting down on traffic congestion, and reducing air pollution as well as the added benefits to our health and wellbeing.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the current proposed timescale for the construction of five grade-separated junctions, whether there is any opportunity to speed up the insertion of a median barrier for safety reasons on the entirety of the A1 between Hillsborough and Loughbrickland.

(AQW 2280/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Improving connectivity between Belfast and Dublin is a key priority for me, as is promoting road safety. The proposed A1 Junctions Phase 2 road improvement scheme includes the construction of four grade separated junctions, a new on-slip at Castlewellan Road, Banbridge and a new link road at Milebush Road, Dromore.

In advance of the main scheme, approximately 6.5km of central reserve safety barrier has been installed along the A1 over the past few years. However, the main scheme represents the best way forward in terms of further safety measures.

In the meantime, I can assure the Member that my officials are continuing to explore opportunities and timescales for other safety measures on this route.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the permanent removal of graffiti on the bridge at Finaghy railway station.

(AQW 2281/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My officials have been working in conjunction with Belfast City Council to identify options to discourage the on-going problem of graffiti on this bridge. A study, that is due to be completed in early March, has been commissioned. When the report has been received, officials will consider the best way to tackle the problem.

In the meantime, arrangements have been made to paint over the graffiti on the road side of the bridge. This work was due to start week commencing 24 February 2020, however due to low temperatures and the unsettled weather, this has been put on hold until week commencing 2 March 2020, subject to favourable weather conditions.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the dates on which communication took place between NI Water and Balmoral Golf Club concerning the need to access land for the Sicily/Marguerite Park Flood Alleviation Project; and (ii) the nature of that communication.

(AQW 2282/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that following the major flooding incident in this area of South Belfast in June 2012, as the lead Agency, the Company developed a multi-million pound project, which aimed to contain floodwaters in the local watercourse flood plain and further reduce the risk of internal property flooding. This option involved the use of part of the flood plain located within the grounds of Balmoral Golf Club. Initial discussions with Balmoral Golf Club commenced in February 2013 and continued until September 2018. During this time there were circa 17 official meetings with the club. Initially these were to discuss proposals/options and provide technical information, before discussions moved onto negotiations relating to compensation for the works.

NI Water made an offer of compensation to the Golf Club based on a valuation provided by Land and Property Services. The Golf Club felt unable to accept the offer, instead proposing up front compensation significantly greater than Land and Property Services' valuation. Government accounting rules advise that any compensation must be within the boundaries of that determined by Land and Property Services, and as no agreement could be reached NI Water formally closed out negotiations with Balmoral Golf Club on this option on 11th September 2018.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the failure of the initial proposal to alleviate flooding in the Sicily Park and Marguerite Park areas, what proposals she will bring forward to expedite the extension of the Belfast Stormwater Tunnel and any ancillary works.

(AQW 2283/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that following severe flash floods on 27 June 2012, the Company carried out investigations and developed a series of projects to reduce the risk of flooding in the Sicily Park area. Whilst some work to upgrade the existing sewerage and drainage network has taken place to help to reduce the risk of flooding, a number of design proposals / commitments made since 2012, have not been progressed for various reasons. One such proposal was to utilise land within Balmoral Golf Club to attenuate storm water, however, following a series of meetings with representatives from the golf club this did not come to fruition. NI Water has now confirmed that the Sicily Park section of the project cannot be completed until significant sewerage network improvements are completed downstream of Musgrave Park including the extension of the 'Belfast Storm water Tunnel'. It is feasible to progress an interim solution to address flooding in the Marguerite Park and it is expected to commence in early 2021.

To expedite the extension of the Belfast Storm water Tunnel, NI Water intends to undertake preparatory works in 2020/21 including ground investigations, preparation of lands / wayleave notices, and development of a concept design, subject to funding being made available.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the planning application for the proposed George Best Hotel.

(AQW 2284/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Two applications were submitted to Belfast City Council in 2017 for the conversion of the former Scottish Mutual Building in Belfast City Centre to a 63 bed hotel. The council notified my Department on 29 January 2020, of its intention to approve the Listed Building Consent application against the advice of a statutory consultee, the Department for Communities Historic Environment Division.

Following an assessment of the proposal, my officials wrote to Belfast City Council advising that it was not considered necessary to refer these applications to the Department as they did not raise issues of such importance that their impact could extend to a regional or sub-regional level. The Council will now continue to process the applications to a conclusion.

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether any businesses or individuals in North Antrim have been affected by the recent data breach involving Just Park; and (ii) to detail what redress measures have been implemented as a result.

(AQW 2294/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The JustPark data breach occurred when one Northern Ireland corporate client customer was given elevated permission levels, where they were able to view 4,510 business customer names and email addresses, 14 of which were in Northern Ireland. None of the businesses were in North Antrim and no individual customer's details could be viewed.

Justpark have subsequently implemented a number of measures to address the data breach. These include: removing the ability to set up elevated permission levels; revising standard operating procedures; introduction of additional quality assurance steps to ensure corporate client customer account set ups are rigorously tested before going live; and retraining of JustPark staff involved in setting up corporate client customer accounts and permission levels.

Mr Blair asked the Minister for Infrastructure what financial provision she plans to provide in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to address the climate and biodiversity crisis.

(AQW 2311/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Infrastructure Minister, my focus will be on concentrating my efforts and available resources to green our infrastructure and deliver sustainable transport that connects people; unlocks our economic potential; protects our valuable environment; and improves health and well-being, for all our communities across Northern Ireland.

The 2020-21 NI Budget has not yet been agreed. Once my Department's Budget settlement is clear, I will be bringing a clear focus to my priorities including improving connectivity through sustainable transport; to grow the all island economy; to address regional imbalance whilst enhancing our natural environment. Addressing the climate and biodiversity crises will require us to work together, particularly given the current constraints on public finances. I will want to ensure that the climate change dimension is increasingly factored into consideration of investments going forward. Therefore, I will be seeking to avail of the opportunities that arise when we collaborate within and beyond government.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) when the review of the first residents' parking scheme in Rugby Road / College Park Avenue will be complete; and (ii) whether the review will be publicly available.

(AQW 2314/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The first residents' parking scheme in Rugby Road / College Park Avenue, Belfast, came into operation during April 2018. A review of the scheme, which will reflect the needs, experiences and feedback of residents, is currently underway. I will want to make sure that any lessons learnt from this scheme inform wider policy on implementing residents' parking schemes.

At this stage, I am not in a position to advise on a timescale for completing the review, but I can confirm that any findings will be made publically available.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) how many requests for residents' parking schemes have been received by her Department; and (ii) for a list of requests for residents' parking schemes in North Down by (a) location; and (b) date.

(AQW 2315/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since the policy on residents' parking first issued, my Department has received requests for residents' parking schemes in 325 different locations.

Details of locations in North Down where residents' parking schemes have been requested are as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Abbey Estate, Holywood; | ■ Jubilee Court, Bangor; |
| ■ Ardlee Avenue, Holywood; | ■ Lisnabreen Crescent Bangor; |
| ■ Ava Street/Hawthorn Court, Bangor (near Clandeboye Football Club); | ■ Mara Gardens, Holywood; |
| ■ Bangor Town Centre Areas (Adjacent Streets?); | ■ May Avenue, Bangor; |
| ■ Church Green, Holywood; | ■ Park Avenue, Holywood; |
| ■ Church Hill, Holywood; | ■ Park Drive, Holywood; |
| ■ Church View, Holywood; | ■ Park Drive, Bangor; |
| ■ Downshire Road, Holywood; | ■ Railway View Street, Bangor; |
| ■ Downshire Place, Holywood; | ■ Seacliff Road, Bangor; |
| ■ Dufferin Avenue, Bangor; | ■ Sheridan Drive, Bangor; |
| ■ Ean Hill, Holywood; | ■ Southwell Road, Bangor; |
| ■ Greenacres, Bangor; | ■ Spencer Street, Holywood; |
| ■ Groomsport Road, Ballyholme; | ■ Strand Avenue, Holywood; |
| ■ Hillview Place, Holywood; | ■ Strand Mews, Holywood; |
| ■ Jacksons Road, Holywood; | ■ Stewarts Place, Holywood; and |
| | ■ Trevor Street, Holywood. |

Details of requests for residents' parking schemes in North Down by date are as follows:

2010	Southwell Road, Bangor; Ardlee Avenue, Holywood;
2012	Dufferin Avenue, Bangor; Sheridan Drive, Bangor; Groomsport Road, Ballyholme; Seacliff Road, Bangor;
2013	Church Green, Holywood; Church Hill, Holywood; Church View, Holywood; Ean Hill, Holywood; Downshire Place, Holywood; Hillview Place, Holywood; Mara Gardens, Holywood; Park Avenue, Holywood; Park Drive, Holywood; Spencer Street, Holywood; Strand Avenue, Holywood; Strand Mews, Holywood; Stewarts Place, Holywood; Trevor Street, Holywood;
2014	Ava Street/Hawthorn Court, Bangor (near Clondeboye Football Club); Bangor Town Centre Areas (Adjacent Streets); Lisnabreen Crescent Bangor; May Avenue, Bangor; Park Drive, Bangor;
2015	Downshire Road, Holywood; May Avenue, Bangor; Spencer Street Holywood; Trevor Street Holywood;
2016	Downshire Road, Holywood; Jacksons Road, Holywood; Spencer Street Holywood;
2017	Seacliff Road, Bangor;
2018	Abbey Estate, Holywood; Railway View Street, Bangor; Spencer Street Holywood;
2019	Greenacres, Bangor; Jubilee Court, Bangor; Seacliff Road, Bangor; and Spencer Street Holywood,

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail whether she has plans to ensure drivers of vehicles operated under a 10b permit will have the same rights as those in Great Britain.[R]
(AQW 2319/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Prior to my appointment, the Department consulted with key stakeholders on 10b Bus Permits and minibus driving licences in 2017. Following the consultation the Department wrote to 10b Permit stakeholders clarifying the circumstances in which non- profit making organisations may require a Bus Operator Licence.

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/letter-regarding-issue-and-use-section-10b-permits-road-passenger-transport-and-minibus-driving>

The Department also published driving licence guidance to clarify the Department's interpretation on the general requirements for driving minibuses.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/driver-licensing-requirements-minibuses>

In December 2019 the High Court in London provided an important judgement in respect of community bus service permits. Officials are working with DFT officials to determine the outworkings of this judgement in consideration of my options going forward.

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she has plans to introduce a measure similar to Section 22 community bus service permits in Great Britain.

[R]

(AQW 2320/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that some non-profit making bodies in Great Britain provide bus services under Section 22 Permits and that these services are open to the general public at separate fares, while Northern Ireland bus services provided under 10b Permits are closed to specific groups of passengers.

In December 2019 the High Court in London provided an important judgement in respect of community bus service permits. Officials are working with DFT officials to determine the outworkings of this judgement in consideration of my options going forward.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there is provision for a pedestrian crossing on the Brownhill Link Road, Irvinestown, as included in the Local Transport and Safety Measures programme for 2020/21.

(AQW 2337/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of an incident at this location in December 2019 which resulted in the tragic death of a pedestrian and my thoughts are with her family at this difficult time. While I can give no assurance that a crossing point will be installed in the coming financial year, as progress of projects is very much dependent on the forthcoming budget allocation to my Department, I have asked my officials to work up plans to provide a crossing facility at this location at the earliest opportunity possible.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will consider the implementation of a 20mph speed limit outside all schools.

(AQW 2338/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to work actively with partners to reduce death and serious injuries on our roads. I believe that reducing the maximum speed traffic can travel at on some of our roads, particularly those near schools, can help.

My Department is committed to introducing measures that reduce the speed of traffic on our roads. We are currently trialling an arrangement of signs that is intended to allow the introduction of more part-time 20mph limits at schools. We are also trialling the effectiveness of 'signed only' 20mph limits. These would be more economical and could be used more widely in appropriate environments, such as residential areas with schools, than would be possible with the current approach of providing 20mph limits along with traffic calming features. I am expecting receipt of the findings of the trials in the next month or so, and I fully intend to see what potential there is to build on the work already undertaken.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will consider the introduction of a bus service from Loughbrickland to Scarva.

(AQW 2339/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to addressing regional imbalance and better connecting communities across Northern Ireland through our public transport network. I can assure you that I will work to find solutions that will deliver for our communities and improve lives. However, given the severe budget constraints under which my Department has operated over recent years our finances are already under considerable pressure. While I will not allow that to limit my ambition, in taking decisions I will be assessing the full range of pressures reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead.

My Department is currently developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan which will help inform my priorities for future development of the main road and rail networks, including the potential for new bus services across all of Northern Ireland. I expect to consider draft proposals and options in the coming weeks.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will consider the feasibility of a train station in Banbridge.

(AQW 2340/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the potential which additional halts on our railway network could provide to areas such as Banbridge. As I have inherited severe and challenging budget constraints with significant pressures across my Department, I will be assessing these pressures reflecting my priorities, the commitments in "New Decade: New Approach" and the budget made available for the period ahead. It is, therefore, too early to comment on when funding will be available to open additional railway stations within the rail network.

My Department is currently developing proposals for a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan which will help inform my priorities for future development of the main road and rail networks, including the potential for new railway stations. I expect to consider draft proposals and options in the coming weeks.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 1092/17-22, will electrically assisted scooters and skateboards be covered by any new legislation on electrically assisted pedal cycles.

(AQW 2341/17-22)

Ms Mallon: You will be aware of my recent announcement to bring forward, as soon as possible, the necessary legislation which will remove Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs) from legislative scope. In relation to electric scooters and skateboards it is illegal to use these vehicles on public roads in Northern Ireland and at present I have no plans to change this.

I am, however, aware of the ongoing debate in many countries, in particular about the significant increase in the use of electric scooters, mainly in large towns and cities, which has seen a number of fatalities and serious injuries occur of both riders and members of the public. I understand that in GB the Department for Transport, as part of a wider transport review, is considering consulting on the use of electric scooters on public roads and I have asked my officials to engage with their counterparts in the Department for Transport.

It is important we consider the potential environmental and health benefits that these types of vehicles can deliver while also being very mindful of the safety implications their use may have for both the rider and wider public.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 1092/17-22, to outline (i) what legislative method is being considered to bring EAPCs in Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom; and (ii) the estimated timetable for this.

(AQW 2342/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Bringing EAPCs in Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom will require an amendment to domestic legislation. This legislation is subject to the Assembly Affirmative Procedure and as such, will require Assembly scrutiny and approval before it can come into operation. I therefore intend to bring this in front of the Assembly for debate as soon as possible. As part of this process I have asked the DFI Committee to consider the proposed legislative change and I look forward to receiving its response.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what progress has been made in the last three years on the adoption of the pedestrian footbridge adjacent to the Kesh River bridge in Kesh, Co. Fermanagh.

(AQW 2343/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the importance of this footbridge to both residents and visitors in the village of Kesh, and the marinas at both Kesh and Muckross. The lack of a footway on the A35 Kesh Bridge is far from ideal and I appreciate the need to find a way to preserve the footbridge, bring it back into service and into the adopted road network.

My officials are in discussions with other parties, including Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. They are pursuing a collaborative approach to progress repair work.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) whether a traffic safety audit has been carried out following the reopening of the Centra supermarket and service station on the A5, Curr Road, Omagh; (ii) if so, whether it focused on northbound traffic queuing around the bend because of delays for vehicles entering the southern entrance; and (iii) what can be done to eliminate potential traffic accidents.

(AQW 2344/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The service station and associated facilities on the A5 Curr Road were the subject of a planning application, which was considered to be a replacement of an existing facility and was subsequently approved by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. Consequently, a road safety audit was not required by the applicant, as there was no requirement for modifications or improvements to the public road.

A one way system for separate access and egress was approved as part of the planning permission. This arrangement, when delivered by the owner, should improve safety for north bound traffic, as they will only be permitted to enter the northern access and exit from the southern access.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's policy for the (i) identification, control, removal; and (ii) liabilities of Japanese knotweed found growing around (a) roads; and (b) rivers.

(AQW 2346/17-22)

Ms Mallon:

- (i) My Department has environmental policies defining the procedures for the identification and management of invasive species, including Japanese knotweed. Information on new sites containing Japanese knotweed is recorded on Departmental Divisional Invasive Species databases, for future management purposes. Control strategies and methodologies are devised, taking account of the site-specific factors. Where required, the affected area may be cordoned off to mitigate the risk of spreading the invasive species. My Department also uses chemical treatment on or removes Japanese knotweed, in line with procedures containing best practice on preventing spread, and disposes of it in a suitably licenced landfill facility.

- (ii) My Department manages Japanese Knotweed, along with other invasive species, to ensure the safety and integrity of roads and to ensure that flood defences are not compromised. The primary obligation imposed on the Department by relevant environmental legislation, relates to the control and prevention of spread of Japanese knotweed, which is on land owned or maintained by the Department. The Department does not have the remit to control invasive species on a more general basis adjacent to watercourses. However, if it is likely to cause a significant flood risk in a watercourse for which my Department has maintenance responsibility, the invasive species would be treated or removed.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure when Omagh MOT centre will be fully operational.
(AQW 2352/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current disruption to the vehicle testing services at the Driver and Vehicle Agency's (DVA's) test centres is not acceptable and I have worked to minimise the disruption and to return to a safe and fully operational testing service as quickly as possible. This has included the immediate issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates, extending the opening hours at DVA test centres and commissioning two independent reviews to provide me with expert advice on the next steps.

Based on expert engineering, audit, procurement and legal advice, on 27 February I announced that an order for 52 new lifts had been placed with an accelerated production programme. The new lifts will begin to be installed from April, with all lifts to be in place by July. Once the new lifts are installed, this will return the MOT centres to full capacity. I have asked my officials to prepare an implementation plan for the new lifts which will be installed on a phased basis from April and the plans for each centre will be confirmed as soon as possible.

Until all lifts are replaced and fully operational, I will ensure that all vehicles continue to be provided with the necessary cover to allow them to remain on the road; either through the issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates (TEC) or a priority appointment with the DVA. Testing on heavy goods vehicles, buses and motorcycles is continuing as normal and priority appointments are being given to taxis, customers with four year old cars, and car dealerships.

The safety of all staff and customers is my priority. In ensuring safety, disruption has inevitably been caused to DVA customers.

I want to assure you that officials in the DVA are doing everything possible to resolve the issues as soon as possible and that I will continue to monitor this situation very carefully.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she would grant the Old Inn, Crawfordsburn, authority to have two brown directional signs erected in the vicinity.
(AQW 2399/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's current policy in relation to brown tourist direction signs, which was developed in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board prior to my tenure in office, is to provide such signs to highlight tourist attractions and guide visitors to their desired destinations via the most appropriate route at the latter stages of their journey, particularly where destinations are hard to find.

Signs are not provided for privately operated premises on A and B class roads as the postal address alone should be sufficient to enable visitors to find their destination. My officials advise they do not envisage potential visitors encountering difficulties locating The Old Inn, Crawfordsburn using existing signage, as the Inn fronts onto Main Street, Crawfordsburn, which is the 'B20', and Crawfordsburn itself is already signed from the A2 Bangor Road. For these reasons and as one of the main aims of the policy is to prevent proliferation of signage, I would not consider it appropriate to grant approval for the provision of brown tourist directional signs at this time.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps she has taken to increase the road maintenance fund.
(AQW 2408/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the importance of investment in our roads infrastructure to generate regionally balanced growth and to improve connectivity. I am committed to improving our infrastructure to help communities and make lives better with the funding made available to me

For a number of years my Department has received funding at much lower levels than are required to maintain the roads infrastructure in a steady state. My capacity to direct additional funding for the repair and maintenance of roads, within this financial year is restricted by the budget available to me. However, I received £3m from the Finance Minister as part of a HM Treasury redistribution earlier this month, from which I allocated £1.2m for the repair of street light outages and £0.8m to repair potholes.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Finance Minister, in advance of the 2020/21 budget. The availability of future funding for road maintenance will be determined when there is more certainty around future budgets.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has to address the backlog of street lighting repairs.
(AQW 2409/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I understand and share the concerns of the public affected by street light outages and am working with my Departmental officials to address this issue as quickly as possible.

I am pleased to inform the Member that I have recently allocated £1.2m to address the current outage backlog and future outages up to 31 March 2020. My Department's internal and external contractors have commenced work on outage repairs in all Divisions.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance as part of the 2020/21 budget discussions, in order to better maintain our roads and deal with other growing pressures facing my Department.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure when will the Newtownards MOT centre be fully operational.
(AQW 2412/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The current disruption to the vehicle testing services at the Driver and Vehicle Agency's (DVA's) test centres is not acceptable and I have worked to minimise the disruption and to return to a safe and fully operational testing service as quickly as possible. This has included the immediate issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates, extending the opening hours at DVA test centres and commissioning two independent reviews to provide me with expert advice on the next steps.

Based on expert engineering, audit, procurement and legal advice, on 27 February I announced that an order for 52 new lifts had been placed with an accelerated production programme. The new lifts will begin to be installed from April, with all lifts to be in place by July. Once the new lifts are installed, this will return the MOT centres to full capacity. I have asked my officials to prepare an implementation plan for the new lifts which will be installed on a phased basis from April and the plans for each centre will be confirmed as soon as possible.

Until all lifts are replaced and fully operational, I will ensure that all vehicles continue to be provided with the necessary cover to allow them to remain on the road; either through the issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates (TEC) or a priority appointment with the DVA. Testing on heavy goods vehicles, buses and motorcycles is continuing as normal and priority appointments are being given to taxis, customers with four year old cars, and car dealerships.

The safety of all staff and customers is my priority. In ensuring safety, disruption has inevitably been caused to DVA customers.

I want to assure you that officials in the DVA are doing everything possible to resolve the issues as soon as possible and that I will continue to monitor this situation very carefully.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the vehicle lift replacement and repair programme across all MOT centres.
(AQW 2413/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I announced on 27 February the purchase of 52 new car vehicle lifts for all Driver and Vehicle Agency MOT centres. The 52 new lifts will be installed between April and July, as part of a number of measures I have taken to resolve the MOT situation. Once the new lifts are installed, this will return the MOT centres to full capacity. I have asked my officials to prepare an implementation plan for the new lifts which will be installed on a phased basis from April and the plans for each centre will be confirmed as soon as possible.

Two new lifts had already been installed to provide additional capacity, one in Belfast and one in Newbuildings. These lifts were pre-ordered at the end of 2019 as part of a programme to increase capacity within the testing network and their deployment was accelerated due to the current disruption. These lifts were independently assessed and checked before becoming operational. The Belfast lift opened on 1 February and the lift in Derry on 7 February. Three existing lifts have also been independently checked and are now operational. These lanes are being used to test vehicles in three priority groups.

All 15 test centres across Northern Ireland are open and testing vehicles. Testing on heavy goods vehicles, buses, motorcycles and retests is continuing and the heavy duty lanes are also being used to prioritise all taxis and four year old car customers, for private customers and dealerships. Extended opening hours are also in place in order to minimise disruption to customers and increase capacity.

A priority vehicle contact line (0300 200 7862) was opened on 11 February 2020, for use by the three priority vehicle groups, which include four year old cars due their first MOT within two weeks, taxis and car dealerships.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the flood alleviation scheme in Eglinton, with particular regard to the realignment of the Castle river.
(AQW 2417/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has recently completed a feasibility study for flood alleviation works in Eglinton. The proposed scheme involves the construction of approximately 2,700 metres of flood defences along the Muff and Castle Rivers, through the town and further downstream adjacent to Derry City Airport. As part of the scheme it is also proposed to re-profile and widen approximately 500 metres of the Castle River, upstream of Main Street Bridge and also through Cottage Row playing fields, to create a flood storage area.

The next stage is to test the proposals from a value for money and deliverability perspective and this work is now in hand. I am keen that this stage is brought to a swift conclusion and hope to be able to provide a further update on the timing for this important scheme in the near future. However, until my budget is known for future years and I have considered my competing priorities, I cannot give a commitment as to when these works could be delivered.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme; and (ii) if it remains open, what options are available for those on benefits.

(AQW 2418/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department's Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme is designed to encourage the owners of residential properties that are located within known flood prone areas, to modify their properties to make them more resistant to flooding. The scheme remains open to new applications, while an evaluation is undertaken to consider its effectiveness. This evaluation will inform decisions on the next steps with the current scheme or any future scheme that I may wish to introduce.

There are no specific options available to those on benefits within the current scheme. However, there is already a significant grant element, which if an application is approved, will cover 90% of the total survey and estimated installation costs, up to a maximum of £10,000.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all planned road safety improvements for West Tyrone.

(AQW 2432/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Details of planned Local Transport and Safety Measures schemes to be completed in West Tyrone during the current financial year can be found in the Council reports that were presented to Fermanagh and Omagh District and Derry and Strabane District Councils. Links to these reports can be found at:

- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/annual-report-to-fermanagh-omagh-district-council-2019.pdf>
- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/derry-city-strabane-district-council-report-spring-2019.pdf>

I am committed to working to find solutions that deliver better results for our communities and improve lives across Northern Ireland. I will be assessing capital funding pressures across my Department and the budget made available to me for the period ahead. Budget allocations for the incoming 2020/21 financial year have still to be determined and consequently details of our future works programmes for these Council areas are not yet available.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has plans for a digital submission and administration system to replace the current planning portal.

(AQW 2436/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department is taking a leading role in the delivery of a new, modern and up-to-date Planning IT System for Northern Ireland that will replace the existing Planning Portal.

This is a high priority project for my Department and is a good example of central and local government working together to deliver a common IT system that will support and enhance planning services. It will deliver new and improved services to the public who will in the future be able to submit and pay for planning applications online as well as via the normal routes.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether she intends to legislate for the removal of permitted development rights that currently enable the exploration of hydrocarbons; and (ii) if so, for a timescale to bring forward relevant amendments to the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

(AQW 2468/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that there is widespread public concern that the existing provisions on permitted development rights for hydrocarbon exploration do not provide a suitable balance between supporting exploration and protecting amenity and the environment.

My Department has undertaken a public consultation on a review of permitted development rights for mineral exploration and I intend to consider the options for the way ahead over the coming months.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what cash reserves do NI Railways currently hold.

(AQW 2473/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I can confirm that Translink's cash reserves are projected to be c£22m by the end of this financial year at the end of March 2020. Cash reserves are dealt with at a group level and so I am not able to provide you with figures for NI Railways.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what cash reserves do Translink currently hold.

(AQW 2474/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I can confirm that Translink's cash reserves are projected to be c£22m by the end of its financial year at the end of March 2020.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 625/17-22, where there is (i) unregistered; and (ii) unadopted land being used by members of the public that requires maintenance, whether she will consider the establishment of protocols between her Department and local government bodies to have this land made safe for public users.

(AQW 2524/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As outlined in the response to AQW 625/17-22, my Department's maintenance responsibilities only extend to land and property that my Department owns and the public road network. I therefore have no capacity or authority to direct funding to maintain land for which my Department has no statutory responsibility.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she intends to (i) review the guidance on minibus licenses issued on 12 April 2018; (ii) implement Directive (EU) 2018/645; and (iii) allow drivers with grandfather rights to be treated the same as people who hold grandfather rights in England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 2537/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Prior to my appointment, my Department published comprehensive guidance in April 2018 which provides advice on minibus driving licences. This guidance sets out the Department's interpretation of the EU derogations for volunteer drivers and drivers operating under grandfather rights.

The Department for Transport is due to consult on (EU) Directive 2018/645 mid-March and intends to implement the Directive UK-wide in May 2020. My Department will analyse the responses to the consultation and any potential impact on public guidance to ensure that it is consistent with current legislation and I will then consider the way forward here.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department plans to update their guidance on 10B permits to ensure access to the permits for (i) Rural Community Transport Partnerships; and (ii) other community groups who operate on a non-profit basis.

(AQW 2538/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Prior to my appointment as Minister for Infrastructure my Department wrote to Rural Community Transport Partnerships and other community groups who operate on a non-profit basis. My Department set out the conditions for access to 10B Permits and provided advice on how permits should be used.

My Department is working closely with the Department for Transport to develop a clear understanding of a recent Judgement handed down by the High Court in London in December 2019 regarding the term "non-commercial".

My Department will analyse any potential impact the Judgment has on public guidance to ensure that it is consistent with current legislation and I will then consider the way forward.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she intends to introduce a community bus permit.

(AQW 2539/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that some non-profit making bodies in Great Britain provide bus services under Section 22 Permits and that these services are open to the general public at separate fares, while Northern Ireland bus services provided under 10b Permits are closed to specific groups of passengers.

In December 2019, the High Court in London provided an important judgment on what activities can be defined as "non-commercial". The ruling did not provide a definition of "non-commercial", but it outlined a set of principles to help permit holders, issuers and licensing authorities determine commercial activity.

Officials are working with DFT colleagues to determine the outworkings of this non-commercial judgement and any potential implications for legislation and public guidance going forward.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister for Infrastructure to confirm who has responsibility for internal security arrangements for ports in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2565/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The seaports in Northern Ireland are responsible for their own internal security arrangements.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) she has considered consultation responses for exempting vehicles of historic interest from MOT testing; and (ii) she intends to change the rules for MOT exemptions for these vehicles.

(AQW 2567/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware that this exemption was introduced in Great Britain in 2018 which has led to a difference as to how Vehicles of Historic Interest (VHIs) are treated in GB and NI.

I am also aware that following lobbying from both elected representatives and members of the public that my Department ran a public consultation exercise in 2019 seeking views as to whether this exemption should be introduced here.

My officials have provided me with the background to this issue including an analysis of the consultation responses received which will help me decide how best to progress this policy.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) a list of the departmental fleet, broken down by cars, vans, HGVs etc.; (ii) the usage of these vehicles.

(AQW 2568/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Rivers Operations, Roads Operations and DVA operate and maintain a range of fleet and plant assets of various classifications to help enable the delivery of key services.

Rivers has a vehicle fleet that comprises 75 small and medium sized vans, 68 crewcabs and 24 lorries (which includes tipping lorries and vehicle transporters). In addition, it also has construction plant items, which include 53 excavators, 22 tractors, 12 forklifts and 13 dumpers. These assets are used in the delivery of key business objectives including: the maintenance of watercourses and flood defences; works to alleviate the risk of flooding; responding to flood emergencies; and providing assistance through Service Level Agreements with other departments.

Roads has a fleet of 430 vehicles comprising 381 large, medium and small lorries, and 49 large, medium and small vans. It also has a range of plant and equipment including 8 snow blowers, 28 excavators, 63 tractors, 40 loaders and 80 road rollers. These assets are used in the delivery of emergency and planned road maintenance including: winter service gritting and snow clearance; pothole repair; gully emptying; grass cutting; verge maintenance; road marking; and street lighting maintenance.

Roads and Rivers work closely together and co-operate in sharing vehicle, plant and other assets, where necessary.

DVA has a fleet of 19 cars, 13 motorcycles and 3 vans. These are used in the delivery of compliance and roadside enforcement, training, driver test supervision and on-road motorcycle tests.

The former Department for Regional Development purchased a Nissan Leaf, Acenta (electric vehicle) in 2015. It is currently used by Department for Infrastructure staff for business purposes, mainly to attend site visits and meetings. The majority of journeys are in the Greater Belfast area and usage to date is 22,448 miles.

Since taking up my post as Infrastructure Minister, I have been using the e-car for Ministerial business, as much as possible.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure to undertake an assessment and timely programme of works for street lighting throughout Strabane town and the surrounding area.

(AQW 2611/17-22)

Ms Mallon: An assessment of the street lighting outages in Strabane and the surrounding area has been carried out, as part of a review of the outages across the entire Derry and Strabane Council area.

I have been raising the need for additional investment with the Minister for Finance and I am pleased to report that my Department has now been allocated additional funding for street light repairs, as well as for Winter Service gritting and road maintenance. This has enabled two repair teams to be deployed on a full time basis within Derry/Strabane District Council area, to address the backlog of outages.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the greenway project utilising the old railway line from Derry to Portadown via Strabane and Omagh, which had been scoped under the previous Minister.

(AQW 2612/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My predecessor published 'Exercise – Explore – Enjoy: a Strategic Plan for Greenways' in November 2016. Developed in consultation with Councils, the plan proposed a 1,000km greenway network across Northern Ireland and provided a framework within which Councils could develop their greenway plans.

The Portadown – Derry route corridor was identified in that Plan. Three Councils have developed feasibility studies (funded by my Department) for various parts of the route corridor, one of which has also developed a detailed design. I am not aware of any further work by Councils to progress their delivery of these projects.

Over the coming weeks I want to consider carefully how provision of greenways can assist as part of my vision to enable greener infrastructure and more sustainable travel that connect communities and improves lives.

I have raised the need for future funding with the Finance Minister to ensure we can deliver critical and transformative investment in our infrastructure. I hope he and Executive colleagues will be supportive in coming weeks.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) what priority is being given to improve the wider layout of Bellspark Road at its junction with the Orchard Road/Prospect Road; and (ii) when this scheme of works is scheduled.

(AQW 2613/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department has plans to progress a scheme to improve the Bellspark Road / Orchard Road junction, which will involve changes to the existing layout to make it safer for users. The new layout will introduce a staggered cross roads and remove obstructions to both forward visibility and the junction visibility splays.

I have inherited severe budget constraints, and therefore at this stage, I am unable to confirm a timescale for the delivery of this scheme.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans she has in place to address flooding in Boho, Co. Fermanagh. (AQW 2650/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Flooding in the Boho area of Co Fermanagh usually occurs when water levels in the Sillies River rise after prolonged and heavy rainfall. Officials have in the past considered a flood alleviation scheme for this area, that would involve the diversion of the Sillies River and improve the gradient in this flat and slow flowing river. Unfortunately, the costs of these proposals far outweigh any benefits in terms of flood alleviation that would be gained.

However, my Department has established a community resilience group in the Boho area, to help residents be more resilient to the impacts of flooding. Officials have also developed strong links with other response organisations and the voluntary sector, to provide co-ordinated multi agency support to individual properties or communities that may be cut off by flood water and require access to essential services.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many times her Department had discussions with Translink about Phase 3 of the Derry to Coleraine railway line between January 2017 and January 2020. (AQW 2664/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Phase 3 of the upgrade to the Derry to Coleraine railway line was not within Departmental capital budgets between January 2017 to January 2020, the project has not reached a stage where a project team has been established. Therefore prior to my appointment no discussions on the Phase 3 took place between the Department and Translink in this timeframe.

I recognise the significant interest in the future delivery of Phase 3 upgrade of the Derry –Coleraine railway line. I am committed to addressing regional imbalance and better connecting communities across the North with a clear focus on public transport including rail. I have asked officials to provide me with an updated briefing with the view to further engagement with Translink and Stakeholders in the North West.

Ms Rogan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she will include the (i) Cumber Road, Drumanness; (ii) Slievegrane Road, Downpatrick; and (iii) Ballydonnell Road, Downpatrick, on the winter gritting schedule. (AQW 2685/17-22)

Ms Mallon: My Department receives many requests each year for additions to the winter gritting programme. For that reason, the Department has a long standing Winter Service policy based on objective assessments, to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across Northern Ireland. This ensures the Department grits approximately 28% of the public road network, enabling 80% of traffic on our roads to move with care during periods of adverse winter weather.

Currently, one of the main criteria for inclusion of a road in the scheduled gritted network is that it should be a through route (i.e. a route linking towns and villages) carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day. In addition, through routes with special difficulties such as severity, frequency and extent of gradient, carrying between 1,000 and 1,500 vehicles per day may also be included. There should also be no reasonable alternative route available.

On the basis of current traffic volumes, the Cumber Road, Drumanness; Slievegrane Road, Downpatrick; and Ballydonnell Road, Downpatrick do not satisfy these requirements.

While I would like to be able to expand our gritting service to many other routes, it is simply not feasible to do this at present, due to the severe budget constraints and many other pressures faced by my Department. This is an issue I hope to address with Executive Colleagues.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any capital works being considered by her Department to improve sewerage and waste water infrastructure in Newry. (AQW 2720/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am advised by NI Water that during the current Price Control (PC15) period, from 2015 – 2021, NI Water is delivering £5.7 million in base maintenance at the Newry Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW), investing a further £2.1m in the upgrade of Newpoint Wastewater Pumping Station inlet screens and is developing a drainage area model of Newry's sewer network.

- NI Water has included the following projects in the Business Plan presented to the Utility Regulator for the period April 2021 to March 2027 (known as Price Control 21):
- Newry Wastewater Treatment Works upgrade to comply with new environmental standards and enable future growth (costing ca £25 million);
- Newpoint wastewater pumping station combined sewer over flow; an investment of ca £5 million;
- Conduct public realm infrastructure renewal projects for water and sewer networks; and
- Solutions developed from the Newry drainage area modelling studies to address the sewer capacity issues identified.

The prioritisation of works during any Price Control period is led by the Utility Regulator, in consultation with NI Water and its other statutory regulators. It is also subject to adequate funding being made available. As Minister, I have inherited a range of capital pressures and, although I am determined to prioritise investment in water and wastewater infrastructure, I am also conscious of the need to address regional imbalance, improve connectivity and address climate change within current

budget restrictions. I have already alerted the finance Minister to the pressures in my Department and the need for them to be addressed in the forthcoming budget if we are to deliver on our collective ambition to build more homes and grow our economy in areas such as Newry.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the current status of all enforcement notices served by her Department in relation to the Mobuoy illegal dump.
(AQW 2882/17-22)

Ms Mallon: There are currently 7 planning enforcement notices affecting the land at Mobuoy Road. All 7 notices have taken effect.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of the City Centre Connectivity Study, for her assessment of the importance of public transport access to Belfast city centre, for the benefit of the elderly and those with limited mobility.
(AQO 250/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Belfast City Centre Connectivity Study was jointly carried out in late 2019 by the Department for Infrastructure, the Department for Communities and Belfast City Council. The study has produced a draft Vision for Belfast which imagines how the city could be fundamentally transformed by 2035 to deliver on the ambitions of the Programme for Government and the Belfast Agenda to improve wellbeing for all, irrespective of age and disability, by tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth.

My assessment is that an efficient public transport system providing accessible connections to the centre of the Belfast is of great importance to everyone living and working in, or visiting, the city. It is particularly crucial, however, for the most vulnerable in our society who are older or with limited mobility and who depend on public transport for access to opportunities. I also recognise that getting people in to, out of, and around Belfast as efficiently as possible and with as low a carbon footprint as possible, is essential to the future sustainable and inclusive economic growth of the city including the retail economy. That means less space given over to cars and more people walking, cycling and using public transport in a cleaner, greener, more vibrant, city centre better designed to meet the needs of all of its users. Our experience of the Glider – where the number of people with disabilities using services grew by 25% in the first six months of operation as compared to those on former Metro services – underlines the value of investment in public transport to promote accessibility and build connections which help transform people's lives and improve wellbeing for all.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on what has been spent on flood defences on the River Finn, since 2015.
(AQO 249/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Since 2015, my Department has spent around £190,000 on works to alleviate the risk of flooding from the River Finn in the Clady area.

In addition to this, a flood alleviation scheme on the Donnygowen Burn where it joins the River Finn is due to commence in spring 2020. This scheme, which is estimated to cost £300,000 involves the construction of floodwalls, which will reduce the risk of flooding to six properties in the immediate vicinity of Clady Bridge.

My Department has also completed a flood study to investigate flooding from the River Finn that affects around 10 properties that are located along the Urney Road, about a mile outside Clady village. This study looked at various options to reduce the risk of flooding to these properties. Unfortunately, the cost of defences is estimated to be almost three times more than the benefits and therefore, particularly given the budgetary pressures across my Department, a publicly funded scheme is not economically viable.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Infrastructure what action she is taking to address the backlog of non-compliant heavy goods vehicles.
(AQO 248/17-22)

Ms Mallon: Whilst my Department has been continuously engaging with goods vehicle operators, processing applications and providing advice and guidance through informal meetings, there is now a backlog in the public and non-public inquiries required to take regulatory action against non-compliant operators.

I am clear as to the importance of getting these hearings back on track. The public need to be assured that vehicles are being operated safely, and the industry needs to be assured that all operators are performing to the same standard, with no commercial advantage being gained by those non-compliant operators.

In order to address this backlog my officials have recruited additional staff to manage casework, and have appointed four presiding officers qualified to conduct the hearings. These presiding officers also sit as Deputy Traffic Commissioners in Great Britain and, as publically appointed officials, can lead proceedings and direct regulatory action, as necessary, on behalf of my Department.

In addition to this, my officials have engaged closely with other statutory bodies to ensure that information relevant to hearings is provided in a timely and accurate manner; and have worked with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service to

secure suitable facilities to conduct these hearings. I know it will take time to work through the backlog, but I am confident that priority cases will soon be scheduled.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department will review Article 8A and Schedule 3A of the Road Traffic Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, giving particular consideration to sports clubs that have been impacted financially by this legislation.

(AQO 244/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Roads (Miscellaneous Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 amended the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997 to provide the specific power to hold special events on public roads.

The legislation provides a legally defined basis for the purpose of holding special events on roads and puts in place a framework so that events can be held in a safe and controlled way. The special events provisions were commenced in September 2017.

I recognise the strength of feeling among local sporting clubs and Athletics NI of the impact on the introduction of this legislation and I think it is important to review it to see how it is operating in practice. I am pleased to confirm that my Department is undertaking a review. I hope that anyone involved with holding an event will take the opportunity to contribute to the review. My aim would be to gather as much data as we can to gauge how the legislation is operating in practice.

The review will start imminently and I would envisage that we should be reporting on findings some time during the summer months.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure how her Department is improving road safety for cyclists.

(AQO 251/17-22)

Ms Mallon: As Minister responsible for promoting and improving road safety, I want to pay particular attention to the safety of the most vulnerable road users, that is, people who choose to walk and cycle.

This is particularly important because I want to increase the proportion of journeys that people make by walking and cycling. A number of studies have shown that the provision of segregated cycle lanes or off-road cycling infrastructure, such as greenways, can give people the freedom and confidence to start cycling or cycle more.

Over the coming weeks I want to carefully consider how the provision of safe cycling infrastructure can assist as part of my vision to enable greener infrastructure and greater sustainable transport that connects communities and improves lives.

Currently, my Department has an annual programme of safety measures aimed at improving road safety generally, including for those who choose to walk or cycle.

In February 2019, my Department developed a new cycling safety campaign which has two objectives. The campaign encourages drivers to give extra consideration to road users who walk and cycle. It also encourages people who walk and cycle to give consideration to all other road users.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on current and proposed funding for roads maintenance, street lighting repairs and sewerage infrastructure.

(AQO 243/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise the importance of having a modern and sustainable sewage and road infrastructure which enables regionally balanced growth and improves connectivity.

I am committed to enhancing our infrastructure to improve lives across Northern Ireland. Water and sewage infrastructure are key to delivering on the programme for government and unlocking growth. Investment in roads improves connectivity while supplying a street lighting repair service helps keep our communities safe.

In my engagement with the Minister of Finance, I have stressed the need to address years of underfunding; this is not a sustainable approach to recurring pressures.

Current funding levels for maintenance of our roads is £105million in the current year; this is short of the annual funding requirement of £143million to keep our roads in a steady state.

There are 288,000 street lights in the north and so street lighting repairs is an on-going activity. As a consequence of inherited budgetary challenges, a backlog of some 12,800 broken street lights across Northern Ireland had built up which are now being urgently rectified following an additional in year funding of £3m of which £1.2m has been directed to getting the street lights working again.

In terms of funding for sewerage infrastructure - in total, some £2.5bn is needed by NI Water for water and waste water investment from 2020/21 to the end of the next regulatory Price Control (PC21) period in 2027. Of this, some £1.2bn will be invested in improving wastewater treatment and sewerage services and £650m is required specifically for sewerage issues in Belfast under the Living with Water Programme. Looking further ahead, it is estimated that a further £800m will be required to complete the LWWP in PC27.

I will continue to work collaboratively with the Minister of Finance and Executive colleagues to ensure sustainable investment in our infrastructure as part my Budget negotiations for future periods, and I want to stress and reiterate to colleagues that if we are to show the public that this place can really work and that our Executive can deliver for them and their families then we need to get the basics right. Infrastructure is the foundation on which we can build our ambitions and we must invest in it.

Ms C Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure what engagement she has had with the Irish government to ensure the original commitment of £400m for the A5 Project is reinstated.

(AQO 242/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am committed to tackling regional imbalance, connecting communities and improving road safety. There are so many communities, particularly in rural parts west of the Bann, who can benefit from investment in the A5 Project. I am, therefore, determined to deliver progress.

The A5 Project is a commitment of the Executive and the UK and Irish governments in New Decade: New Approach.

In this Agreement, the Irish Government reaffirmed its £75 million commitment to the project, to contribute to the first phase of the scheme from New Buildings to north of Strabane.

I very much welcome this commitment and also the Irish Government's commitment to the Ulster Canal, Narrow Water Bridge and Belfast to Dublin rail projects. These are all important in terms of all island connectivity and economic growth.

A Public Inquiry on A5 Western Transport Corridor project is currently under way. I await its findings later this year.

Whilst the current focus is around the Inquiry and the first phase of the project, I recognise the need for further discussions with Executive colleagues and the British and Irish Governments to secure the necessary funding to complete the whole scheme from New Buildings to Aughnacloy.

I look forward to further engagement around funding in particular you can be assured, as soon as my counterpart is appointed in the Dail Eireann. I will be seeking a meeting so that we can work collaboratively across this island to deliver better all island connectivity and economic growth. Improving lives, connecting communities and delivering radical change.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how much of the additional £3m allocated for winter gritting services, street lighting repairs and roads maintenance will be committed to pressures in the Southern Division.

(AQO 245/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Finance Minister announced £1m in January Monitoring for Winter Service and a further £3m in February as a result of HM Treasury redistribution of funds (totalling £4m resource funding for my Department).

This additional funding, although late in the year, is very welcome and will, in addition to allowing the continuation of gritting services until the end of March, help me meet some of the most pressing concerns for people in our society which are filling potholes and repairing broken street lights.

I have allocated to Southern Division an additional:

- £195k of this funding to winter gritting services (to 31 March);
- £225k to street lighting repairs to clear the backlog; and
- a further £235k to roads maintenance (filling potholes).

Mr Muir asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her plans for investment in water and sewerage infrastructure to allow new connections and avoid an increase in pollution incidents.

(AQO 246/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am aware of the increasing issues at wastewater treatment works and in the sewerage system. I am concerned that this is having an impact on the environment and on planning decisions in respect of housing and business developments seeking connection to the sewerage network.

Through the Price Control process, my Department, NI Water and other key water stakeholders will work together to prepare a priority list of schemes, for delivery in PC21(which runs from 2021 to 2027), and beyond, to help address potential development constraints and ensure that our environment is protected.

I welcome the commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach agreement to address years of underfunding in waste water, and I am working with the Finance Minister and my Executive colleagues to secure the level of budget required.

Although I am determined to prioritise investment in water and wastewater infrastructure, as Minister, I have inherited a range of capital pressures and, I am also conscious of the need to address regional imbalance, improve connectivity and address climate change within current budget restrictions.

Department of Justice

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to provide a list of items that have been intercepted while being smuggled into prisons.

(AQW 1856/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): The Northern Ireland Prison Service list which specifies articles that have been intercepted while being smuggled into establishments is set out below for each of the last four years and included is a list of prohibited articles found in the establishments:

Maghaberry	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Reception	97	113	89	5	304
Visits	22	12	14	1	49

		2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
HMP Maghaberry	Alcohol	28	40	10	14	92
	All Types	9	24	9		42
	Document	2	7	3	2	14
	Drugs	237	215	223	238	913
	Mobile Phone	12	20	5	8	45
	Other	1141	1159	1215	1222	4737
	Phone Equipment	20	10	5	8	43
	Sim Card		3	1	2	6
	Unknown Substance	37	55	72	81	245
	Weapon	30	28	29	17	104
Total	1517	1561	1572	1592	6241	

Magilligan	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Reception	24	13	38	5	80
Visits	12	16	11	1	40

		2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
HMP Magilligan	Alcohol	6	11	4	6	27
	All Types		3			3
	Document	2		1	2	5
	Drugs	60	84	71	40	255
	Mobile Phone	17	24	8	10	59
	Other	213	250	152	168	783
	Phone Equipment	27	23	12	14	76
	Sim Card	5	5		1	11
	Unknown Substance	45	35	30	26	136
	Weapon	5		4		9
Total	380	435	282	267	1364	

Hydebank Wood	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Reception	2	20	128	3	153
Visits	3	12	15	0	30

		2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Hydebank Wood	Alcohol	2				2
	All Types	1		1	1	3
	Document			2	3	5
	Drugs	20	16	19	157	212
	Mobile Phone		5	1		6
	Other	141	82	115	233	571
	Phone Equipment	5	5	6		16
	Sim Card	1		3		4
	Unknown Substance	9	9	22	45	85
	Weapon	5	5	12	5	27
Total		184	122	181	444	931

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice (i) for her assessment of the definition of the phrase “capable of being born alive” within section 25 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 1945; and (ii) how her the Department ensures that health professionals are aware of this provision at the current time, before the introduction of the new regulatory framework on 31 March.

(AQW 2085/17-22)

Mrs Long: The interpretation of the legislation is a matter for the courts with the assistance of such expert evidence as is considered necessary.

Guidance for health professionals on the subject of abortion is a matter for the Health Minister.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the groups funded by her Department; (ii) the constituency in which each of these groups are based; and (iii) the amount and duration of the funding awarded.

(AQW 2152/17-22)

Mrs Long: Details of funding provided by the Department and its Agencies to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector organisations during the 2018-19 financial year are shown in the table below.

The table details the amount paid in 2018-19 and the total duration of the funding commitment to the organisation. It is not possible to provide information on constituency as information is not recorded in this way.

Group	Amount Paid to Group during 2018-19 £	Total Duration of the Funding Committed
AGE North Down & Ards	3,353.54	2 years
Age Sector Platform	400.00	1 Year or less
All Lives are Precious	17,168.50	1 Year or less
Barnardo's	137,195.27	1 Year or less
Belfast and South Eastern Domestic Violence Partnership in conjunction with Women's Aid	2,277.31	1 year or less
Belfast Community Sports Development Network	6,009.00	3 years
British Red Cross	1,584.77	2 years
Bytes	998.00	1 Year or less
Central Benevolent Fund	33,415.00	1 Year or less
Children's Law Centre	6,060.64	3 years
Clonard Monastery Youth Centre	3,838.00	1 Year or less
Community Intercultural Programme – Freedom Acts Project	7,111.40	3 years
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	107,000.00	1 Year or less

Group	Amount Paid to Group during 2018-19 £	Total Duration of the Funding Committed
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	16,692.44	3 years
Community Search & Rescue	16,000.00	1 Year or less
Community Sports Network	55,089.00	1 Year or less
Corcrair & Redmanville Youth Drop-in	1,445.00	1 Year or less
Corpus Christi Youth Centre	4,727.75	1 Year or less
Corpus Christi Youth Centre	4,550.00	2 years
Craigavon Travellers Support Committee - Traveller Youth Project	1,750.00	1 Year or less
Crimestoppers	20,000.00	1 Year or less
Cruse Bereavement	50,394.00	1 Year or less
Dialogue For Diversity	1,737.00	3 years
Dreamscheme Northern Ireland	8,527.90	1 Year or less
Drumgor Detached Youth Work Project	2,805.00	1 Year or less
Edgarstown Residents Association	4,576.00	1 Year or less
Edgarstown Residents Association	4,050.00	3 years
Extern	309,825.00	1 Year or less
Feeny community Association/ Feeny Youth Group	1,812.30	2 years
Foyle Search & Rescue	6,000.00	1 Year or less
Gaelic Athletic Association	5,000.00	1 Year or less
Hillcrest Trust	2,100.00	2 years
Housing Rights Service	117,539.99	1 Year or less
Include Youth	58,500.00	1 Year or less
Irish Cave Rescue Organisation	9,999.85	1 Year or less
Irish Football Association	5,000.00	1 Year or less
Lagan Search & Rescue	8,000.00	1 Year or less
Leafair Community Association	7,922.67	2 years
Life Change Changes Lives	17,800.00	3 years
Lorag Youth Project	5,000.00	1 Year or less
Lough Neagh Rescue	2,400.00	1 Year or less
Loveworks	5,000.00	1 Year or less
Lyric Theatre	10,000.00	1 Year or less
Melmount + East Bank Estates Community Associations Forum	3,465.00	1 Year or less
Men's Action Network	4,950.00	1 Year or less
Men's Action Network	4,000.00	2 years
Mens Advisory Project	29,455.58	1 Year or less
Mid & East Antrim Agewell Partnership	7,132.72	3 years
Misc	128.75	1 Year or less
Mourne Mountain Rescue	13,999.00	1 Year or less
Naomh Coll - CLG	4,710.00	1 Year or less

Group	Amount Paid to Group during 2018-19 £	Total Duration of the Funding Committed
New Lodge Youth Centre	4,999.00	1 Year or less
Nexus Institute NI	8,500.00	1 Year or less
NIACRO	666,299.29	1 Year or less
NICVA/Volunteer Now	1,701.17	1 Year or less
North West Mountain Rescue Team	15,999.57	1 Year or less
North West Play Resource Centre	4,090.00	3 years
Northern Ireland Alternatives	107,000.00	1 Year or less
Northern Ireland Alternatives	20,346.01	3 years
NSPCC	417,999.69	1 Year or less
OASIS Antrim	4,980.00	1 Year or less
Off the Streets Community Youth Initiative	5,450.19	3 years
Parenting NI	6,132.54	3 years
Pint-sized Productions	3,000.00	1 year or less
Poleglass Community Association @ Sally Gardens	10,820.00	3 years
Prison Arts Foundation	112,923.80	1 Year or less
Prison Fellowship	28,426.00	1 Year or less
Prison Service Trust	240,000.00	1 Year or less
Quaker Service	7,009.00	1 Year or less
Quest (The Advantage Foundation)	37,453.26	1 Year or less
Redeeming Our Communities (ROC)	10,389.19	3 years
Relate NI	4,270.00	1 Year or less
Respect	4,500.00	1 Year or less
Rosario Youth Centre	4,980.00	1 Year or less
RUC GC Widows Association	19,400.00	1 Year or less
Rural Crime Partnership	4,998.80	1 year or less
Safelives	6,670.00	1 Year or less
Saints Youth Centre	3,214.00	1 Year or less
Samaritans	12,000.00	1 Year or less
SARDNI	7,000.00	1 Year or less
Shankill Women's Centre	3,000.00	1 Year or less
Sky Watch Civil Air Patrol	5,058.00	1 Year or less
SOS NI	5,428.00	3 years
Spanner in the Works	17,550.00	1 Year or less
Sport and Thought Programme	3,360.00	1 Year or less
St John Vianney Youth Centre, St Malachy's Youth Centre + Short Strand Community Forum	4,896.00	1 Year or less
St Teresa's Youth Centre	4,654.00	1 Year or less
St. Peters Immaculata Youth Centre	5,000.00	1 Year or less
St. Peters Immaculata Youth Centre	3,221.64	3 years
The Consumer Council	19,999.66	1 Year or less

Group	Amount Paid to Group during 2018-19 £	Total Duration of the Funding Committed
The Y Zone - Portadown Elim Church	1,100.00	2 years
Top Ten Women's Drama Group	3,170.30	3 years
TREE Training	5,000.00	1 Year or less
Ulster GAA	8,811.00	1 year or less
Upper Springfield Resource Centre	10,600.00	2 years
Victim Support NI	1,849,312.80	1 Year or less
Women's Aid Federation NI	110,000.00	1 Year or less
YMCA Lurgan	4,995.32	1 Year or less
Youth Initiatives	4,918.50	1 Year or less
ZKJ Ltd	4,000.00	2 years
	5,013,123.11	

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what plans her Department has to introduce Helen's Law in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 2231/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Prisoners (Disclosure of Information about Victims) Bill, known as Helen's Law, is currently before Parliament. This includes provisions which will, if passed, place a statutory duty on the Parole Board in England and Wales to consider non-disclosure of victims' remains as part of its assessment of consideration of release of prisoners, where the Board believes the prisoner has such information.

I have every sympathy with Charlotte Murray's family and am aware of their desire to see the law changed as is proposed for England and Wales.

I am meeting with the family soon and will be considering the issue further in light of the passage of the Westminster Bill and local representation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many current prisoners have had their sentences increased due to crimes in prison.
(AQW 2234/17-22)

Mrs Long: In circumstances when an individual in custody is convicted and receives a custodial sentence for another offence(s), an additional separate custodial sentence is imposed. This may result in an extended period in custody rather than an increased sentence.

The exact location of a criminal offence is not recorded on the data systems of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and although information on the location of the offence may be held within the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service operating system, it is not in a form which is readily available.

Identification of the number of individuals who had their period in custody extended as a consequence of receiving an additional custodial sentence for an offence committed while in prison would require a manual trawl of court records and incur a disproportionate cost.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the accountability mechanisms that exist for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and whether she plans to carry out a review.
(AQW 2238/17-22)

Mrs Long: As I indicated to the member in our introductory conversations as chair of the committee, I am currently considering whether the time is right to take stock of the policing oversight arrangements, bearing in mind that it is now 20 years since the major policing reforms were implemented and 10 years since justice was devolved.

I have not yet consolidated my thinking on this but will ensure the Justice Committee and other key stakeholders are kept informed of what I decide.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department has any plans to remove wire meshing, grills and observation post at Omagh courthouse.
(AQW 2430/17-22)

Mrs Long: The observation post at Omagh Courthouse was removed in February 2020.

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has no plans to remove the wire meshing and grills from Omagh Courthouse.

NICTS does not comment publically on security measures.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice whether she will legislate to remove the preliminary inquiry stage from court proceedings for more serious offences.

(AQW 2449/17-22)

Mrs Long: I plan to introduce a Committal Reform Bill to the Assembly before the summer recess which will pave the way for the direct transfer of serious cases to the Crown Court, without the need for a traditional committal hearing. This will build on existing legislative provisions in the Justice Act (NI) 2015 which provided that committal will be abolished for murder and manslaughter cases initially.

The Department is presently considering the removal of further offences from the committal process with the longer term aim, in line with a recommendation from the NI Audit Office Report on Avoidable Delay, to abolish committal proceedings entirely for all Crown Court cases.

For those Crown Court cases which are not initially subject to direct committal, the Bill will seek to remove oral evidence from victims and witnesses as part of the committal process, effectively abolishing preliminary investigations and mixed committals.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) all organisations in the North Antrim constituency that have received funding through the Assets Recovery Community Scheme from 2018; and (ii) the total funding awarded to each project.

(AQW 2450/17-22)

Mrs Long: One organisation located in the North Antrim constituency received funding through the Asset Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) from 2018. An open call for applications launched in August 2018 for funding across three financial year periods up to 31 March 2021.

Mid and East Antrim Agewell Partnership's project "Friends Against Scams" aims to create local business scam Champions and identify and support older people at risk of falling victim to scams. £21,844 was allocated to the project over a three year period (2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21).

In addition, there are a number of projects that have received funding under the current Scheme which are operating on a Northern Ireland-wide basis and which are having a positive impact on the lives of people across all constituency areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment on (i) why anonymity orders are disproportionately higher at Londonderry Magistrates Court; and (ii) how this equates to open justice principles as set down in legislation.

(AQW 2464/17-22)

Mrs Long: The granting of an anonymity order is a judicial decision. An anonymity order may be granted for defendants, victims or witnesses and normally prohibits the naming of an individual but does not prohibit the reporting of the proceedings.

While it is accepted that the numbers of such orders are higher within certain court locations these are judicial decisions and it would be inappropriate of me to speculate on the basis for them.

Open justice is a key principle of the justice system and of society, however a court may, in the interests of justice, deem it necessary to depart from this principle.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to outline any preparations being undertaken by her Department to deal with the impact of Brexit.

(AQW 2492/17-22)

Mrs Long: The precise impact of the UK's departure from the EU will not be known until details of any Future Security Partnership (FSP) between the UK and the EU have been agreed. The UK Government's ambition for a FSP is for a comprehensive, close and balanced partnership which fosters reciprocal co-operation in criminal matters. The Department of Justice is actively working with the Home Office to ensure that the particular needs of Northern Ireland are known as part of the FSP negotiations and also with PSNI and other justice agencies to identify likely risks and mitigations.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice for an update on her Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.

(AQW 2493/17-22)

Mrs Long: The means by which the Northern Ireland Protocol may be implemented, and any corresponding impact this may have on the justice system, is not yet fully known. Clarity is needed urgently from UK Government and I have written to the Home Secretary in this regard.

Work is underway to address the implications of the NI Protocol by linking with the Department for Economy (DfE), the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) colleagues.

Potential risks and mitigations have been identified as far as possible and will be re-visited as the impact of the Protocol becomes clear. The number of staff working on EU exit related issues, including the Northern Ireland protocol is currently the equivalent of six full-time members of staff, made up of a variety of Grades.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the challenges posed to cross-border cooperation in policing and justice as a result of Brexit; and (ii) what contingency plans have been put in place to deal with these challenges.

(AQW 2494/17-22)

Mrs Long: Cross-border police co-operation is good and facilitated, in part, by cross-border policing agreements with Ireland and joint task force working, all of which will continue following the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Cross-border co-operation is further enhanced by around forty EU justice measures. The UK will continue to have access to these measures during the transition period up to the end of 2020. These include operational measures such as: the European Arrest Warrant; access to IT systems on matters such as wanted and missing persons, criminal records and DNA profiles; and membership of EU agencies such as Europol and Eurojust.

The UK and EU have now published their respective negotiation mandates. It is clear that while both sides want comprehensive and close cooperation, the negotiations will be difficult. It is also clear that not all existing EU measures will be replicated under existing arrangements.

It is not, therefore, possible at this stage to be precise about if, and how, cross-border policing will be impacted by any new arrangements.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Justice what resources have been set aside during the current financial year for training police to identify and deal with issues arising from domestic violence.

(AQW 2495/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the deployment of resources during the current financial year for training police to identify and deal with issues arising from domestic violence are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Justice what extra resources she intends to allocate to the PSNI's Cyber Crime Unit.

(AQW 2496/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to the deployment of resources to the PSNI's Cyber Crime Unit are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Justice for an update on placing reporting requirements to Access NI on a statutory footing.

(AQW 2497/17-22)

Mrs Long: There are no reporting requirements in relation to AccessNI.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of the Home Office provide, on a daily basis to AccessNI, lists of those persons deemed to be unsuitable to work or volunteer with children or adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. AccessNI subsequently checks these lists against individuals applying for work with vulnerable groups.

The DBS has the statutory responsibility for determining whether any individual in Northern Ireland should be prevented from working with children and or adults and added to the lists. This is known as "barring".

In turn, organisations in Northern Ireland have a statutory duty to report to the DBS any person in their employment who is dismissed or would have been dismissed from working or volunteering with adults or children because they have;

- Been cautioned or convicted of a relevant offence;
- Engaged in conduct in relation to children and/or vulnerable adults i.e. an action or inaction (neglect) that has harmed a child or vulnerable adult or put them at risk of harm; or
- Satisfied the harm test in relation to children and/or vulnerable adults, i.e. there has been no relevant conduct but a risk of harm to a child or vulnerable adult still exists.

This action allows the DBS to consider whether that person should be added to the lists of those barred from working with vulnerable groups. Policy responsibility for all issues relating to "barring" lies with the Department of Health.

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Justice to outline the estimated timeframe for introducing legislation to address coercive control and protect victims of abusive relationships, in line with what exists elsewhere in the UK.

(AQW 2498/17-22)

Mrs Long: My officials are currently working with Legislative Counsel to finalise a Domestic Abuse Bill. The Bill includes a range of measures to protect victims of abusive relationships, including provision to capture patterns of control or coercive behaviours. I would hope, with the agreement of the Executive, that the draft Bill could be introduced into the Assembly by April/May this year.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to detail what engagement she has had with the Ministry of Justice to ensure Northern Ireland's land border with the Republic of Ireland is not exploited by those engaged in criminality after Brexit.

(AQW 2560/17-22)

Mrs Long: My officials have had significant engagement with the Home Office to identify and assess the impact of Brexit and the potential for an increase in cross border criminality.

The potential for an increase in crime across the Irish border due to any new tariff or excise regimes following implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol is recognised but cannot yet be quantified with any certainty until such times as the UK Government provides clarity on the NI Protocol and the precise implications are known.

The risk of cross-border crime is recognised and will be kept under review as the EU exit negotiations continue.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice whether the 1988 and 2006 Police Pension Schemes are legislatively closed to police officers; and whether they are now deemed to be discriminatory.

(AQW 2562/17-22)

Mrs Long: Under the relevant legislation, the 1988 Police Pension scheme closed to new scheme members on 6 April 2006. The 2006 Police Pension scheme closed to new members on 1 April 2015.

However, both the 1988 and the 2006 Police Pension Schemes remain open to existing scheme members and neither are deemed to be discriminatory.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice for an explanation as to why no adverse impact to Section 75 groups was found in the Equality Impact assessment of the Police Pension Regulations (NI) 2015, given the demographic changes to the PSNI following the implementation of the Patten report.

(AQW 2563/17-22)

Mrs Long: An Equality Screening Form was completed for the Police Pension Regulations (NI) 2015 and the policy was screened out. The Department of Justice was satisfied that Section 75 groups were unlikely to be disproportionately affected by the common framework for pension reform contained in the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. The evidence examined did not indicate any gaps or opportunities upon which to take action.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to outline how the current Police Pension Regulations (NI) 2015 differs from the Police Pensions Regulation 2014 (England and Wales), in terms of the 1987/88 and 2006 schemes being closed to officers who fell outside the discriminatory protections.

(AQW 2564/17-22)

Mrs Long: Currently, there is no difference in the application of the Police Pension Regulations between England and Wales and Northern Ireland with regard to officers who fell outside the protections. The two Career Average Revalued Earnings schemes are interoperable.

In both jurisdictions, the 2014/2015 Police Pension Regulations determine that those members in the 1987/88 and 2006 schemes, to whom transitional protections did not apply, would transfer across to the new Career Average Revalued Earnings Scheme on 1 April 2015. Benefits accrued in their previous scheme up to the 31 March 2015 are preserved.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Justice how vulnerable prisoners gain access to evidence-based psychological services in prison.

(AQW 2591/17-22)

Mrs Long: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) is responsible for the provision of healthcare services to people in custody. The Trust's clinical psychology services are accessed by referral through the Prison Healthcare Mental Health teams that are located in each of our three prisons.

NIPS has a team of forensic psychologists, working with those in custody to address their offending behaviour and help them to reduce their risk of reoffending. Staff in the Prisoner Development Units work with Psychology staff to assess and refer prisoners for group work or individual programmes to challenge offending behaviour.

Dr Aiken asked the Minister of Justice for an updated assessment of the implications of the McCloud judgement on public service pension scheme members in Northern Ireland, including the police.

(AQW 2645/17-22)

Mrs Long: Public Sector Pensions Schemes (including the police scheme) take their direction from the Department of Finance with regard to the outcome of the McCloud judgment. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the Department of Finance.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice to outline the implications of the (i) McCloud judgement; and (ii) the Home Office circular on the Aaron case, on the accessibility of the 1988 and 2006 pension schemes for police officers.

(AQW 2655/17-22)

Mrs Long: Public Sector Pensions Schemes (including the police scheme) take their direction from the Department of Finance with regard to the outcome of the McCloud judgment. You may, therefore, wish to direct any questions relating to the McCloud judgment to the Department of Finance.

Both the 1988 and the 2006 Police Pension Schemes remain open to existing scheme members.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Justice whether she will review the Access NI system in general, but with particular regard to the adequacy of inter-regional and cross-border information sharing to protect children and vulnerable people from those who have committed offences beyond our jurisdiction.

(AQW 2869/17-22)

Mrs Long: AccessNI work to ensure that both their administration process and IT system are up to date and reflect the current United Kingdom safeguarding regime.

Criminal Record Information is shared through the Police National Computer (PNC) which holds information from all regions of the United Kingdom. In addition and unique to AccessNI it is also able to obtain criminal conviction and other information from the Republic of Ireland in relation to qualifying applications for enhanced checks for applicants seeking to work or volunteer with vulnerable groups.

Given that both areas are already covered satisfactorily I have no plans for a formal review at this time.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Justice whether she intends to review the conditions whereby bail is granted to suspects who have been charged with terrorism-related offences.

(AQW 2918/17-22)

Mrs Long: Provision on bail or the detention of persons arrested in connection with terrorism is an excepted matter. A decision to take forward a review of bail for those charged with an offence under the Terrorism Act 2000 would therefore fall to the Northern Ireland Office to consider.

The operation of the bail framework is underpinned primarily by Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to liberty and security). This requires that a person charged with an offence must be released pending trial unless there are relevant and sufficient reasons to justify continued detention. The starting point for all pre-trial remand decisions is the presumption of innocence. This is a fundamental tenet of and protection within the law, consistent with the principle of the right to a fair trial.

Bail can only be refused if one or more of five broad risk factors have been met. These are:

- Risk that the accused will fail to appear for trial if they are released on bail;
- Risk that the accused will interfere with the course of justice while on bail (e.g. that they will destroy evidence that could be used against them at their trial or that they could interfere with witnesses who are due to give evidence at their trial);
- Risk that the accused will commit further offences while on bail;
- The accused would be at risk of harm (from himself/herself or from others) against which they would be inadequately protected if released on bail; or
- Risk to the preservation of public order if the accused is released on bail.

Bail cannot be refused purely on the grounds that the accused has been charged with a very serious offence, including terrorism-related offences. However, the seriousness of the offence is likely to be taken into consideration as a factor in determining if one of the five grounds for refusing bail exists.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant 2053/17-22, will she now direct that such records are made and retained in assessable form going forward.

(AQW 3093/17-22)

Mrs Long: Particulars of endorsements and disqualifications required by the Road Traffic Offenders (NI) Order 1996 are provided in line with the specified requirements. Any orders granted under the legislation are recorded and passed to the appropriate authority to action.

The Integrated Court Operating System provides a mechanism for this to be done but not for the information in relation to orders under specific sections of the legislation to be extracted without an extensive manual exercise and assessment.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the proportion of young people from a Catholic background in custody in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, in comparison to young people from other backgrounds.

(AQO 257/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Youth Justice Agency is working with children, families and communities to address vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour through targeted support and early intervention, to prevent children being drawn into the criminal justice system. This approach has led to a considerable reduction in the number of children entering custody in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre – over the past five years, the average daily population has fallen from 34 to only 18 children.

There is, however, a recognition that there is a disparity in the religious breakdown of those entering Woodlands with, on average, 63% of the children coming from a Roman Catholic background over the past five years.

As noted in the last inspection report by Criminal Justice Inspection NI, this matter is not directly within the control of the Youth Justice Agency. Woodlands is the recipient of children sent by police and courts; they must accept and work with every child referred, and have no right to exclude, nor options to assess suitability before accepting a child from Court. As corporate parents, Woodlands staff deliver all necessary supports and services to children in their care, including providing for their spiritual and religious needs.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister of Justice what assurances she can give that the 50:50 recruitment policy will not be reintroduced for the PSNI.

(AQO 258/17-22)

Mrs Long: I am not persuaded we have reached the point where we need to consider the re-introduction of '50:50' recruitment. Obviously, if there were consensus among the political parties and key policing stakeholders that we should be contemplating this, we would have to give it due consideration, but it is clear that such a consensus does not exist at present.

I want to make sure our Police Service of the future is reflective, not just in respect of religious make-up, but also in terms of other characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and so on. I think we also need to see more applicants from working class communities. Ultimately, what will build confidence in our Police Service is when people look at their police officers in their community and see a reflection of themselves.

If problems are identified, we would need to look at what are the real or perceived barriers to recruitment in the community and how we deal with these. I understand that work in this respect is underway within PSNI and I welcome that.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Justice whether she will provide for effective, visible and responsive policing in Northern Ireland by committing to address the projected £53 million shortfall in the PSNI budget for 2020-21.

(AQO 259/17-22)

Mrs Long: Decisions relating to effective, visible and responsive policing and the deployment of policing resources are an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

I am aware of the 2020-21 budget shortfall projected by PSNI. I met with the Finance Minister on 18 February at which time we discussed total justice related pressures including those in relation to PSNI.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to introduce new guidelines to help prevent parental alienation during divorce proceedings in family court cases.

(AQO 260/17-22)

Mrs Long: Family cases involving significant parental acrimony and alienation are amongst the most difficult to come before the courts. Where alienation is suspected, it is for social workers to advise the court and the introduction of guidelines to inform that advice would be a matter for the Department of Health. I understand the Department of Health proposes to look at guidelines as part of the new cross-departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy and that plans are already in place for regional HSC training on parental alienation.

That Strategy will also provide us with an opportunity to collectively consider how to better support relations between parents and parents and children more generally. Key to that work will be early intervention and my Department is already working with the Department of Health to consider actions which might be introduced to reduce acrimony and negative behaviours to improve outcomes for families and children.

I expect the Domestic Abuse Bill that I will shortly bring forward will also assist where alienation is evident. The Bill will make behaviour that is coercive or controlling or which amounts to psychological or emotional abuse a criminal offence. Abusive behaviour can be indirect and where the victim is under 18, a child sees, hears or is present during an incident of abusive behaviour or is used to abuse a victim, the Bill will provide for the offences to be treated as aggravated and increased sentencing may apply.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Justice to outline what work she is undertaking to speed up the justice system to ensure those accused of crimes appear in court in a timely manner.

(AQO 261/17-22)

Mrs Long: Speeding up justice is one of the biggest challenges facing the justice system and is a priority for the Department, its criminal justice partners and the Criminal Justice Board. It is also a priority in the 'New Decade, New Approach' Deal.

The Department's Speeding Up Justice Programme has four strands: performance reporting; working in partnership; legislation; and research and analysis.

Performance Reporting – The Department has developed data to monitor end to end processing times and identify areas for improvement. This informs Outcome 7, Indicator 38 in the draft PfG and is being used to identify and drive areas for performance improvement.

Working in Partnership – The Department is involved in a number of initiatives to promote collaborative working with a focus on speeding up the justice system, for example Crown Court Cases Performance Groups and Indictable Cases Process (ICP).

Legislation – The Department plans to introduce the Committal Reform Bill before the summer recess. The Bill is designed to address the Fresh Start Panel's recommendation (A10) by abolishing oral evidence at the 'traditional committal hearing' stage, and provide clarity regarding the operational out-workings of direct committal.

Research and analysis – The Department is taking forward a range of research and analysis projects that will improve the speed of the system. For example, we are currently looking at performance in summons cases.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to outline how female prisoners in Hydebank Wood College are receiving emotional support, counselling and support in developing life skills during their custody.

(AQO 262/17-22)

Mrs Long: Hydebank Wood College supports the women in their care, both emotionally and in their self-development, through a person centred approach.

The needs of women coming into custody are complex and diverse and require the establishment of a bespoke response plan to support each individual and build their self-esteem and wellness. This work is undertaken in collaboration with the most appropriate statutory and voluntary partners.

In addition, residential and safer custody staff work with the South Eastern Health Social Care Trust Mental Health team and prison Psychology Services on a one to one basis with an individual to support their transition to custody. Chaplaincy services also provide essential emotional and pastoral support.

Individual tailored interventions include, for example, the provision of additional support from Woman's Aid for those suffering from domestic abuse or, where sexual trauma is present, the services of Nexus are available, to augment the existing care package.

At the point of release NIPS also have a dedicated woman's support officer working with Probation Board for Northern Ireland, and Woman's Aid, to assist their successful resettlement back into the community.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the suitability of courts as venues for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appeals.

(AQO 264/17-22)

Mrs Long: Courthouses are often perceived as buildings which deal only with criminal trials however they are routinely used for a wide range of cases including civil, family and tribunal business.

I acknowledge that not all court buildings offer the type of informal hearing rooms which I consider appropriate for tribunal business. However the use of specific, designated court venues for PIP appeals has been beneficial in reducing delay for appellants; reducing costs associated with renting alternative venues; and offering better access to private areas and consultation rooms than many rented venues.

I recognise that, for some individuals, attending a court building for a benefit appeal hearing can be a stressful experience and I am committed to reviewing the ongoing suitability of the court estate for this type of business to improve the experience for appellants. I have written to the Minister for Communities, who has statutory responsibility for the Appeals Service, requesting a meeting to discuss this important issue.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's position on the funding of the pathfinder project on Transformation of Custody Healthcare beyond 31 March 2020.

(AQO 265/17-22)

Mrs Long: PSNI is already funded for the provision of health assessment and appropriate care and treatment to persons detained in police custody suites under the statutory obligations of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

A business case, which is being developed jointly by the PSNI and the Public Health Agency, is expected shortly and will inform cross-departmental discussions on the future funding model, both for the pathfinder project and the options in respect of a regional roll-out of an enhanced model of healthcare provision for individuals detained in police custody. A regional roll-out would deliver criminal justice requirements but would also importantly connect the individual to wider healthcare provision and address issues of equality of care.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice why it will take a year from Royal Assent to roll-out domestic violence legislation
(AQO 266/17-22)

Mrs Long: I am keen that the new domestic offence is in place as soon as possible. I would hope to be in a position to bring the Bill to the Executive for approval shortly and on introduction would hope that this Assembly will work with me to secure early legislative passage.

My officials continue to have discussions with operational and voluntary sector partners in relation to operationalisation of the new offence, as well as colleagues elsewhere to identify lessons learned. The advice from other local jurisdictions has been that a 9 - 12 month period is needed to train staff across the justice system, as well as other interested parties. Awareness raising and training will be critical to the success of the new offence, so that it is used as effectively as possible.

My Department, along with our statutory and voluntary sector partners, will do all that we can to ensure that the introductory timeframe is kept to the minimum needed. Should a shorter timeframe be possible we will of course facilitate this.

Department for the Economy

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for the Economy to detail any discussions her Department, or previous Departments now under her remit, had with Northern Ireland Electricity regarding the implementation of smart meters in homes.
(AQW 1516/17-22)

Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy): As there is not an active policy to install smart meters in Northern Ireland, no recent discussions have taken place with NIE Networks on this matter.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on her Department's Brexit preparations in line with the Northern Ireland protocol; and how many people are working on ensuring compliance with the protocol.
(AQW 1863/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My officials are working to ensure the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies are as prepared as possible for the end of the transition period. This involves considering all of the Department's legislation, services, policies and strategies to ensure they can respond to the new circumstances resulting from the implementation of the Protocol. I am also considering the measures that may be required to support businesses.

I attend the Executive's Brexit sub-committee and my officials are working closely with those in other Departments to understand the implications and practical delivery of the Protocol and ensuring the Northern Ireland position is represented in the decision making structures in Whitehall.

The practical detail of how the Protocol will be implemented has not yet been agreed by the EU and UK Government, nor has the UK Government set out in detail how it will give effect to the commitments it made in New Decade, New Approach.

As the number of people working on ensuring compliance with the Protocol will ultimately depend on the detail of how it will be implemented, I cannot provide an exact number at this time.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for the Economy, pursuant to AQO 046/17-22, whether Project Stratum is specifically targeted at hard to reach broadband connectivity areas within rural communities.
(AQW 1932/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Project Stratum aims to improve internet connectivity for those premises currently unable to access broadband speeds of 30 Mbps or greater.

Following the receipt of updated broadband coverage data received from suppliers during the procurement process, the number of premises in the target intervention area has been reduced to just under 79,000.

Over 95% of the revised target intervention area is rural, defined using NISRA guidelines as Band H – villages with a population of less than 1,000 and premises in open countryside.

Analysis undertaken by DfE and advice from independent advisors indicates that it is not possible to prioritise specific geographical areas without potentially sacrificing overall coverage, increasing costs and slowing delivery.

While the precise number and location of premises that will directly benefit will not be known until after contract award, the aspirations of my Department continue to be to maximise broadband coverage across the target intervention area.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy to detail what measures are in place to address the skills requirements in advanced manufacturing and engineering.

(AQW 1941/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In response to the increasing demand for skills need in advanced manufacturing and engineering, my Department works closely with South West College (SWC) as the designated Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) Hub. SWC as the lead college for the AME Hub, collaborates with the other further education (FE) colleges across the region to develop teaching and curriculum excellence that will benefit employers, regardless of geographical area. The Hub has established strong industry links with over 205 participating employers including the AME sectoral partnership and other business engagement activity to ensure that curriculum provision and programmes delivered are fully aligned to the sector's current and future requirements.

Assured Skills/Bridge to Employment

My Department's Employer Skills Team worked closely with SWC to develop a more strategic and sustainable programme to address the demand for welders in local companies. The programme was developed following the delivery of a number of Assured Skills welding academies across the six further education colleges in 2018/19 which trained 57 individuals to Level 2, resulting in 43 participants gaining employment.

In November 2019, SWC launched a Manufacturing Support Programme (MSP), to provide the AME industries with an integrated support package for workforce development and growth. MSP assists employers in attracting and retaining the talent needed to continue to improve productivity and competitiveness. The package of measures offered under the MSP include:

- Assured Skills Welding Academy in Dungannon;
- Bridge to Employment welding projects in Omagh, Enniskillen and Dungannon; and
- the opportunity for all eligible firms to avail of Skills Focus to upskill current employees.

Skills Focus

The FE colleges have delivered qualifications to 612 employees in the AME sector in the last two years (1 April 2018 to 31 January 2020) under the auspices of the Skills Focus programme.

InnovateUs

Through the InnovateUs programme, the FE colleges have delivered 178 innovation upskilling projects in the AME sector in the last two years (1 April 2018 to 31 January 2020). The FE Colleges continue to work to develop projects with the AME sector, and in particular with ADS NI, (the representative body for the Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space Industries) to deliver both the Skills Focus and InnovateUS programmes.

Apprenticeships

Funding for apprenticeship training is provided by my Department. Training is available from Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) up to Level 7 (Masters Level). In the case of apprentices aged between 16-24 years, through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, my Department funds 100% of the cost of off-the-job training at Levels 2 and 3. At the end of April 2019, 759 apprenticeships were enrolled on the engineering related programmes. For apprentices aged 25 years and over, funding (at a reduced rate) is focused on specific priority economic sectors (including engineering). An incentive payment is available for employers whose employees achieve all relevant qualifications.

My Department also funds off-the-job training for the Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs), creating an effective and sustainable pipeline for skills development in the Northern Ireland workforce, while offering an alternative route for participants to gain a third level qualification. HLAs in advanced manufacturing and engineering are currently delivered at Level 5 through the further education colleges and at Level 6 by Ulster University.

Higher Education

The Department's Post Graduate Award Scheme provided funding for a total of 86 engineering students at Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University in 2018/19. The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer indicates that HE skills are, in general, only marginally undersupplied. However, there is an imbalance across individual subject areas with the largest undersupply predicted in 'Engineering & Technology' subjects (which includes 'Production & manufacturing engineering').

Northern Ireland's universities are aware of this undersupply, and have taken measures to rebalance provision, with the result that enrolments and qualifications in 'Engineering & technology' subjects have been increasing over the past number of years. Enrolments have increased 36.2% from 2,845 in 2008/09 to 3,875 in 2017/18. Qualifications in these subjects have increased by 41.3% from 690 in 2008/09 to 975 in 2017/18.

Invest NI

Invest NI's support for support for the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing (AEM) sector since 2015 has focussed on Skills & Leadership delivering:

- £10,583k Skills Growth grant offered to companies in the AEM sector;
- £41,183k projected secured spend by companies in the AEM sector;
- 180 offers made to companies in the AEM sector; and

- 48 offers made to develop leadership and management potential in the AEM sector through The Leader Programme, Leading within a Group and Leadership Team programmes.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for the Economy whether she believes that further and higher education institutions should be providing free sanitary products.

(AQW 1956/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I, like my colleagues across the UK, recognise that period poverty is a genuine issue. Officials from my Department are working with a number of other NI Executive Departments, as well as the devolved administrations, to seek a coordinated approach to addressing period poverty.

The six Further Education colleges in Northern Ireland provide access to free sanitary products within 28 of their campuses and plan to extend this service to the remaining sites in early 2020.

In relation to the higher education institutions, Queen's University, Ulster University and St Mary's University College Students' Unions, in partnership with the universities, have provisions in place for free sanitary products in their student union premises.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for the Economy whether all toilet facilities accessible for females, at each further education college, are equipped with sanitary product dispensers; and to confirm whether sanitary products are provided free of charge.

(AQW 1958/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In four of the six regional Further Education (FE) Colleges, all toilet facilities accessible to females, are equipped with sanitary product dispensers. In the other two colleges, the majority of accessible toilets also have these dispensers.

While there is a small charge for using the product dispensers located in the toilet facilities, free sanitary products are available to students, at various college locations, in 28 of the 33 FE campuses. There are plans to extend this free service to the remaining five sites in the coming months.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for the Economy to outline how many new jobs with support of Invest NI have been created since 2010; broken down by constituency area.

(AQW 1986/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest NI moved to Outcome Based Reporting (OBA) in 2017, in line with the draft Programme for Government. As a result of this change the agency now measures the impact of its support based on key performance indicators (KPIs) gathered from a cohort of businesses which it works most intensely with. The agency now tracks the number of additional jobs these companies create each calendar year.

The table below shows the number of additional jobs created in 2017 and 2018 by businesses supported by Invest NI.

Additional Jobs created by companies by Parliamentary Constituency (2017 and 2018)

PCA	Additional Jobs Created
Belfast East	1,427
Belfast North	1,313
Belfast South	4,150
Belfast West	221
East Antrim	227
East Londonderry	510
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1,584
Foyle	778
Lagan Valley	1,277
Mid Ulster	2,239
Newry & Armagh	1,451
North Antrim	707
North Down	167
South Antrim	701
South Down	653
Strangford	341

PCA	Additional Jobs Created
Upper Bann	2,085
West Tyrone	516
Total	20,342

Notes:

- 1 'Additional Jobs' are based on all jobs created by businesses supported by Invest NI during the period under review.
- 2 Totals may not add due to rounding.

Prior to this change in reporting, Invest NI measured jobs created each financial year based on employment related financial support. This information is only available from 2011-12 to 2016-17 and is contained in the table below.

Jobs Created through direct financial support by Parliamentary Constituency (2011-12 to 2016-17)

PCA	Jobs Created
Belfast East	4,346
Belfast North	1,818
Belfast South	6,267
Belfast West	1,224
East Antrim	1,369
East Londonderry	983
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2,565
Foyle	2,414
Lagan Valley	1,546
Mid Ulster	2,724
Newry & Armagh	3,224
North Antrim	1,097
North Down	560
South Antrim	2,911
South Down	1,484
Strangford	686
Upper Bann	3,574
West Tyrone	1,741
Not Determined	77
Total	40,611

Note: 'Jobs created is based on those jobs for which Invest NI customers received a direct offer of employment related support.

These two tables are not directly comparable as different reporting methods, and time periods, have been applied.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of new jobs created in each council area over the last 3 years that have been in receipt of Invest NI financial support.

(AQW 1993/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest NI moved to Outcome Based Reporting (OBA) in 2017, in line with the draft Programme for Government. As a result of this change the agency now measures the impact of its support based on key performance indicators (KPIs) gathered from a cohort of businesses which it works most intensely with. The agency now tracks the number of additional jobs these companies create each calendar year.

The table below shows the number of additional jobs created in 2017 and 2018 by businesses supported by Invest NI.

Additional Jobs created by companies by District Council (2017 and 2018)

DCA	Jobs Created
Antrim and Newtownabbey	870
Ards and North Down	372
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	2,642
Belfast	6,939
Causeway Coast and Glens	804
Derry City and Strabane	1,021
Fermanagh and Omagh	1,051
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1,335
Mid and East Antrim	601
Mid Ulster	3,020
Newry, Mourne and Down	1,689
Total	20,342

Notes:

- 1 'Additional Jobs' are based on all jobs created by businesses supported by Invest NI during the period under review.
- 2 Totals may not add due to rounding.

Prior to this change in reporting, Invest NI measured jobs created each financial year based on employment related financial support. This information is contained in the table below.

Jobs Created through direct financial support by District Council (2016-17)

DCA	Jobs Created
Antrim and Newtownabbey	407
Ards and North Down	132
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	617
Belfast	2,089
Causeway Coast and Glens	150
Derry City and Strabane	305
Fermanagh and Omagh	543
Lisburn and Castlereagh	277
Mid and East Antrim	207
Mid Ulster	595
Newry, Mourne and Down	583
Total	5,904

Note: 'Jobs created is based on those jobs for which Invest NI customers received a direct offer of employment related support.

These two tables are not directly comparable as different reporting methods, and time periods, have been applied.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what Invest NI's work in attracting inward investment to the Strabane area over the last 3 years.

(AQW 1995/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest NI promotes the whole of Northern Ireland as an attractive and viable location for inward investment opportunities to new investors, along with the parent companies of existing foreign owned investors.

Our investment proposition is therefore promoted on the basis of a talented and loyal workforce, advanced telecoms infrastructure, high skilled business clusters, a pro-business environment, competitive operating costs and proximity to major

markets. Ultimately the investor will make the decision as to where they visit and locate based on their specific business needs and having considered the options available to them.

Over the past three years there have been over 26 visits from potential inward investors to the Foyle and West Tyrone constituencies.

Invest NI is an active partner with Derry and Strabane District Council, helping develop the local investment proposition and Community Plan to support attracting investment to the area.

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what, if any, proactive initiatives her Department is planning to attract additional economic investment and job creation projects into areas that have experienced disproportionate higher levels of unemployment and social deprivation, such as Strabane.

(AQW 1996/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest Northern Ireland is committed to PfG Outcome 1 'We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy' and will drive business development on an equitable basis throughout NI.

Through a regional office network, with points of presence in all eleven NI council areas, Invest NI provides a range of financial and practical support to help new business to start-up, indigenous business growth across all of Northern Ireland, as well as promoting the region globally as an inward investment location.

In addition, as a statutory partner in the Community Planning Process, Invest NI is committed to working in partnership with all Councils to help drive economic development

The agency has helped shape the key actions within the economic pillars of all 11 Community Plans including those for the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.

Similarly, my Department and Invest NI continue to work with the Council and other relevant stakeholders on the emerging projects within the region's 'City Deal' proposal which includes a physical regeneration project for Strabane Town Centre.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy whether (i) Invest NI acted fully within its legal and financial competency, when it approved a loan to Wright Bus to the value of £2.5m in June 2019; and (ii) how many other companies have received a similar loan from Invest NI in the last 10 years, broken down by year, company and amount loaned.

(AQW 2023/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) I am confident that Invest NI acted fully within its legal and financial competency when it approved the £2.5m Rescue Aid loan to Wrights Group. To date, Invest NI has received a repayment of £1.5m of the loan and expects full recovery of the balance. Under the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 Invest NI is empowered to provide financial assistance where "in its opinion that financial assistance is likely to provide, maintain or safeguard employment in any part of Northern Ireland."
- (ii) Twenty five businesses (including Wrights Group) have received a Rescue Aid loan from Invest NI over the last 10 years. The amounts of the loans and which financial year the loans were made are detailed in the table below – company names have not been included to ensure confidentiality for the affected businesses.

Rescue Aid Loans

Rescue Aid	140,000
Rescue Aid	75,000
Loans issued in FY 09/10	215,000
Rescue Aid	175,000
Rescue Aid	5,000
Loans issued in FY 10/11	180,000
Rescue Aid	10,000
Rescue Aid	1,000,000
Rescue Aid	400,000
Rescue Aid	350,000
Loans issued in FY 11/12	1,760,000
Rescue Aid	175,000
Rescue Aid	217,000
Rescue Aid	65,000

Rescue Aid	125,000
Rescue Aid	450,000
Rescue Aid	60,000
Rescue Aid	40,000
Rescue Aid	35,000
Rescue Aid	250,000
Loans issued in FY 12/13	1,417,000
Rescue Aid	600,000
Rescue Aid	275,000
Rescue Aid	90,000
Loans issued in FY 13/14	965,000
Loans issued in FY 14/15	Nil
Rescue Aid	200,000
Loans issued in FY 15/16	200,000
Loans issued in FY 16/17	Nil
Rescue Aid	275,000
Loans issued in FY 17/18	275,000
Rescue Aid	305,000
Rescue Aid	395,000
Loans issued in FY 18/19	700,000
Rescue Aid	2,500,000
Loans issued in FY 19/20 (YTD)	2,500,000

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) how much of the £2.5m loan paid to Wright Bus in June 2019 has been repaid; and (ii) whether the repayments are up to date.

(AQW 2024/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) £1.5m of the £2.5m Rescue Aid loan to Wrights Group Ltd has been repaid to Invest NI at this stage.
- (ii) The Wrights Group's Joint Administrators Statement of Proposals issued in November 2019 stated that the Administrators expect that Invest NI will be repaid in full in respect of the £2.5m loan. The Administrators also stated that the duration of the administration is not likely to exceed 12 months. The date(s) of further repayment to Invest NI will be dependent on the administration process.

Ms Dolan asked the Minister for the Economy whether she has set a time frame for the implementation of the EU Work-life Balance Directive.

(AQW 2026/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I have no set timeframe for the implementation of the EU Work-life Balance Directive. The transition period, due to end on 31 December 2020, does not provide sufficient time to transpose the Directive, therefore any commitments taken forward from that Directive by my Department will form part of my Employment Relations domestic agenda.

There is existing legislation in Northern Ireland which already provides for some aspects of the main elements of the Directive, for example, in relation to paternity leave; parental leave; and flexible working arrangements.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for the Economy whether she will consider extending student finance to students who wish to take undergraduate studies, having previously self-funded a degree.

(AQW 2067/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Public funding for student support for higher education should be targeted, in the main, towards students entering higher education for the first time and by and large students will only be funded for their first undergraduate degree to honours level.

The rationale for this is to ensure that our already stretched resources are effectively targeted at those students who have not had a chance to experience higher education and to contribute, therefore, towards widening participation.

There are some exceptions to the policy where students undertaking a second degree leading to a professional qualification including medicine, dentistry, architecture and veterinary science, may be eligible for some additional support, for example students studying for a second degree leading to a medical qualification can apply for a maintenance loan.

Students undertaking second degrees of equivalent or lower qualifications continue to be eligible to receive supplementary allowances such as the Adult Dependants' Grant, Childcare Grant, Parents' Learning Allowance and the Disabled Students' Allowances, if applicable.

There are currently no plans to change the policy regarding undergraduate students with previous study status.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) what her Department and relevant arm's-length bodies are (a) currently doing; (b) planning to do to promote Carrickfergus Castle as a heritage/tourism attraction; and (ii) a breakdown of visitor numbers for Carrickfergus Castle in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2088/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Tourism Northern Ireland's remit is to promote Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland markets.

It achieves this through fully integrated marketing campaigns targeted at specific market segments, which are based on extensive market research. These campaigns include TV, radio, press, outdoor promotions and digital marketing. In addition, all activity is under-pinned by extensive PR and media relations activity.

Tourism Northern Ireland promoted the Mid & East Antrim area including Carrickfergus Castle, in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland markets during 2019.

As part of the 2019 campaign activity, Tourism Northern Ireland featured Carrickfergus Castle and the wider Mid & East Antrim area, including The Gobbins, Glenarm Castle and Whitehead Railway Museum.

Over the course of 2019, Tourism Northern Ireland's International Media Visits Team hosted over 600 international media, and Carrickfergus Castle has been included within these itineraries.

Tourism businesses within the Mid & East Antrim Council area, including Carrickfergus Castle, were also invited to apply for funding support for the Tourism Northern Ireland Co-operative Marketing fund, to support their own promotional activity in the Republic of Ireland market.

Tourism Northern Ireland will continue to promote Carrickfergus Castle in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland markets in its Spring 2020 Campaign, and throughout the year in its PR and digital marketing.

Tourism Northern Ireland will also continue to work closely with the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) network, who collaborate with their tourism industry to upload information on the local area to Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer website, discovernorthernireland.com.

Tourism Ireland

Tourism Ireland highlights Northern Ireland (including Carrickfergus Castle) through its global marketing activity.

As part of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, Carrickfergus Castle benefits from representation at Tourism Ireland's many international trade and consumer platforms. For example, in early February, Mid & East Antrim Borough Council took part in Tourism Ireland's four-city sales blitz to Canada, meeting more than 250 travel agents and group tour operators in the cities of Vancouver, Langley, Edmonton and Calgary.

Tourism Ireland includes information on Carrickfergus Castle across its suite of international websites, in numerous different languages.

Finally, please see below a breakdown of visitor numbers to Carrickfergus Castle in each of the last 5 years as published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA):

Year	Visitor Numbers – Carrickfergus Castle
2014	70,905
2015	63,237
2016	64,837
2017	71,989
2018	68,714

Source: NISRA, Visitor Attraction Survey

NISRA advise that the statistics are on the basis of information provided by the attractions.

Mr Buckley asked the Minister for the Economy what discussions Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council have had with Invest NI regarding the potential for growth in the digital economy in Upper Bann.

(AQW 2104/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest NI is actively engaged with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council regarding the potential for growth in the digital economy in Upper Bann, identified as one of Council's key priority sectors to support prosperity in the local economy.

To date, Invest NI has participated in the Council's Digital Hub Feasibility Project (2017), approved funding of £200,096 for The Digi Transform Programme to grow the digital economy in the ABC area under the Local Economic Development Measure of the EU Investment for Growth and Jobs (2017), and accompanied the Council on a visit to England in April 2018 to review incubator units in the South of England incubating hi-tech companies.

Invest NI's Regional Manager continues to meet with Council Officers monthly to discuss economic development matters. This has included ongoing discussions on the Council's plans for the development of the digital sector.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy what support her Department can give to businesses who have been financially impacted by advertisement deals involving Viewble Media UK Ltd and Grenke.

(AQW 2129/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: I have seen the recent reports in the media and I am very concerned by the difficulties being faced by a number of small businesses and retailers in your constituency and throughout Northern Ireland. I have the utmost sympathy for those affected and hope that a resolution is found quickly.

My Department's Trading Standards Service (TSS) is currently in contact with a number of businesses affected to identify if there have been breaches of business protection legislation. However, as it appears that both Viewble Media UK Limited and Shoppers Network UK Limited have gone into liquidation, the ability of TSS to investigate these complaints may be limited.

TSS is also currently examining whether the protections available under consumer credit legislation may offer a route to redress. TSS will work with the Financial Conduct Authority and Financial Ombudsman Service to see if there is a way forward for those businesses that are currently tied to lengthy and expensive finance agreements with Grenke Leasing Limited.

Any business affected should consider making a complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service For Small Businesses, which has the power to settle disputes between small businesses and businesses that provide financial services. Businesses may also need to consider seeking expert legal advice, where necessary.

I offer my support to those businesses seeking to find a solution and hope that they receive a satisfactory outcome very soon. Traders seeking further advice should contact Consumerline on 0300 123 62 62.

Additionally, the Consumer Council (CCNI) has agreed to meet with representatives of those affected by this issue. The meeting will be held Wednesday 4 March 2020. At the meeting CCNI will consider whether it is possible to use its supercomplaint powers to raise the issue with the Financial Conduct Authority. CCNI were previously made aware of the situation by colleagues in the Federation of Small Businesses and raised the issue with Trading Standards and sought guidance from the Financial Conduct Authority, which was then relayed to the Federation of Small Businesses.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the expenditure on the Ulster Grand Prix, for the last five years.

(AQW 2141/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Tourism NI has provided support for the Ulster Grand Prix via the International Tourism Event Funding Programme for International Events.

The Ulster Grand Prix was awarded a three-year (2014, 2015 and 2016 events) letter of offer totalling £285,000.

- Year 1 – 2014/15 - £115,000
- Year 2 – 2015/16 - £95,000
- Year 3 – 2016/17 - £75,000

Since 2017/18, the Ulster Grand Prix has, through the Tourism NI International Tourism Events Fund, secured the following funding:

- 2017/18 - £67,000
- 2018/19 - £60,000
- 2019/20 - £60,000

My Department does not have access to details of other expenditure associated with the Ulster Grand Prix. I suggest that the member contacts the Ulster Grand Prix directly to request any additional information.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for the Economy what measures her Department are taking to address fuel poverty.

(AQW 2173/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: While the Department for Communities has lead responsibility for fuel poverty, my Department has a key role to play in tackling fuel poverty through setting energy efficiency policy that supports the reduction in household energy use and as a consequence household energy bills.

The Energy Strategy Call for Evidence, out for consultation until 20 March, seeks views on what approaches should be taken to ensure that energy remains affordable for domestic consumers, with a view to supporting the eradication of fuel poverty.

My Department has also been working with the Utility Regulator on a review of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP), which is administered by the Utility Regulator and is funded through a levy on all electricity consumer bills. NISEP is 80% ring-fenced for vulnerable customers.

My Department will work with key partners to carefully consider the evidence provided through the Energy Strategy Call for Evidence and NISEP review that relates to fuel poverty, and use this to inform potential future policy options for a draft Energy Strategy.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy (i) when the contract for Project Stratum will be awarded; and (ii) when will the capital work commence.

(AQW 2191/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) Project Stratum is at mid-procurement stage, with contract award expected in September 2020.
- (ii) My Department's engagement with industry indicates that a 6-9 month period is required for network design and delivery preparation. It is anticipated, therefore, that deployment of infrastructure will commence in April 2021, with completion by 31 March 2024.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for the Economy to provide a progress update on Project Stratum.

(AQW 2193/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Project Stratum is at mid-procurement stage, with contract award expected in September 2020.

My Department published its response to the Open Market Review EU State aid public consultation on 16 December 2019. This confirmed a target intervention area of some 97,000 premises. However, new data received recently from a number of broadband suppliers has resulted in the number of premises requiring intervention being reduced to just under 79,000. Over 95% of those are rural, defined using NISRA guidelines as Band H – villages with a population of less than 1,000 and premises in open countryside.

My Department will seek to maximise broadband coverage across the target intervention area through the utilisation of the £165m public funding, along with an anticipated industry contribution.

Within the revised target intervention area, just under 10,000 premises in the West Tyrone Constituency are eligible for inclusion in Project Stratum. It is important to note, however, that the number and location of premises that will benefit will not be known until the procurement is complete and a contract has been awarded.

An Addendum to the Open Market Review Report was published and a revised Speed and Coverage Template was issued to bidders on 5 February 2020. I understand that one of the bidders has asked for an extension to the tender period and my officials are engaging with the bidder under proper procurement protocols.

To maintain the competitive nature of the procurement, the project team has agreed to a 35 day extension. This will delay contract award from August to until September 2020, but it is important that we do everything possible to ensure that we receive quality bids.

I am aware of recent commentary on the withdrawal of the Confidence and Supply funding following the New Decade New Approach Agreement. However, I can confirm that broadband remains a key priority for the Executive.

It is important that we remove any doubt in relation to the funding and I have, therefore, written to my Executive colleagues, asking that the funding be confirmed for the next four years.

There is nothing to suggest that the funding will not be made available to implement the project as planned.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Omagh Enterprise Centre.

(AQW 2200/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: During 2019 the Chief Executive of Omagh Enterprise Centre (OEC) engaged with the Department and Invest NI seeking funding to redevelop the Omagh Health Centre.

In August 2019, this culminated in the then DfE Accounting Officer, in combination with the DfC Accounting Officer, writing jointly to the OEC Chief Executive, setting out the specific departmental positions in respect of OEC's request for funding to redevelop the Omagh Health Centre.

I understand that the OEC has not applied to Invest NI for funding.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy what plans her Department has to refresh the Higher Education Strategy. (AQW 2251/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- i The Graduating to Success strategy will close on 31 March 2020. The Department will then carry out a review on the strategy.
- ii The Department is presently developing a Skills Strategy which will set the overall direction for skills in Northern Ireland to 2030 and will inform policy, strategy and investment decisions across the education and skills landscape.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy what apprenticeship opportunities will flow from the Belfast Region City Deal. (AQW 2252/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Given the early stage of development of the Belfast City Region Deal it is not yet possible to predict the number and type of new jobs that may be created, or to estimate how many of those will be in the form of an apprenticeship.

The Deal proposal document includes and 'Employability and Skills' Theme which proposes an Apprenticeship HUB. This would provide opportunities to pilot new apprenticeships such as 25+ adult apprenticeships, public sector apprenticeships and shared apprentice solutions for SMEs. However, it is the responsibility of the Councils in the Belfast Region City Deal to work with the projects, which they have selected for inclusion in the Deal, and ensure that these projects provide apprenticeship opportunities.

My Department continues to work with the Belfast Region City Deal officials and has representation on the Employability and Skills Advisory Board. Their role is to provide advice and guidance so that we maximise the employment opportunities for all, including apprenticeships, that may develop from the Belfast Region City Deal.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy what plans Invest NI has to extend their Brexit preparation work to (i) the retail sector; and (ii) the haulage sector. (AQW 2253/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Invest NI will continue to advise and support businesses in all sectors to address the challenges and optimise opportunities arising from EU Exit.

A wide range of Brexit related information, advice and guidance has been made available to all businesses, including those in the retail and haulage sector, via www.investni.com/brexit and www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk.

Invest NI's Brexit information events are delivered in partnership with business bodies (including the Freight & Transport Association and Retail NI) to attract the widest range of businesses.

Once the out-workings of the NI Protocol become clear, Invest NI will provide further advice and guidance to all NI businesses.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy for her assessment of (i) the micro-brewery industry in Northern Ireland; and (ii) whether her Department has any plans to provide additional investment to the sector. (AQW 2275/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The micro-brewery sector plays a vital role in promoting the pure, natural quality of Northern Ireland produce, encouraging more people to buy local and helping promote the region as a world-class food & drink tourism destination.

Invest NI estimates the size of the micro-brewery sector in Northern Ireland to be worth around £3m per annum.

Invest NI will continue to offer its full range of services to those businesses in the sector that have the capability to sell produce into markets outside of Northern Ireland, helping them to invest further in their breweries, to innovate and to grow sales.

Dr Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the funding provided to private companies to provide apprenticeship training over the past 3 years; and (ii) the proportion of apprentices that complete programmes and gain qualifications, by company. (AQW 2377/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In the last three financial years my Department has funded contracted private Training Suppliers £33,434,782.00 to deliver the directed training element of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme at Levels 2 and 3.

The latest figures show that 61% of the 28,469 leavers from the programme between 2013/14 and the quarter ending October 2019 including both Private and Statutory (Further Education College) providers achieved their Full Framework.

We do not have data to show achievement rates broken down by individual companies or by contracted Training Supplier.

The latest published statistics are available using the following link;

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeshipsni-statistics>[https://www.economy-](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeshipsni-statistics)

Higher Level Apprenticeships are only provided by Further Education Colleges and local Universities.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department or the Executive have decided to endorse any bids from Northern Ireland ports or airports for freeport status.

(AQW 2381/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The Executive has not taken any decision in regard. The Treasury is currently consulting on its Freeports policy, the incentives that could be offered, and how they will be allocated. My officials are engaging with them on that, in conjunction with their colleagues in other Executive Departments.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy whether she will support an application made on behalf of the Old Inn, Crawfordsburn for the erection of two brown road signs in the vicinity.

(AQW 2398/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: The decision on the approval of tourism signage is ultimately the responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure.

The applicant's local Council will liaise with Tourism NI, whose role is to establish if the property is certified and open for tourist bookings. In coming to their final decision, the Department for Infrastructure will also take road safety and traffic management issues into consideration.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy for her assessment of the impact restricted access to unskilled migrant workers will have on the Northern Ireland economy.

(AQW 2419/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Analysis undertaken by my Department highlights the significant contribution migrant workers make to the NI economy across the skills spectrum.

This is evident in a number of key sectors that currently rely significantly on EEA migrants, including agri-food, social care, manufacturing and hospitality. In that context, future restrictions on access to EEA migrants are likely to lead to recruitment challenges for these and other sectors.

NI has particular vulnerabilities given its sectoral structure. We have a higher concentration of manufacturing and agricultural jobs, and lower average wages.

Alongside Executive colleagues, I will continue to raise these issues with the UK Government.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy to detail any analysis her Department has undertaken on the number of migrant workers employed in Northern Ireland, broken down by sector.

(AQW 2422/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: My Department has undertaken detailed analysis of migration and employment in NI to inform the development of the post EU Exit UK Immigration Policy.

Migration and the Labour Market analysis can be found here: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/eu-exit-analysis>.

In addition a research paper 'Northern Ireland evidence relevant to the UK Government's Immigration White Paper' brought together evidence submitted to date to the UK Government. This paper, which includes sectoral analysis of migration, was published on the Department's website on 24 October 2019, and can be found here: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-evidence-relevant-uk-governments-immigration-white-paper>.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy whether her Department has any plans to increase financial support for postgraduate students.

(AQW 2431/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: Whilst my Department has no immediate plans to increase the financial support for postgraduate students, it has commenced a review of the wider postgraduate landscape in Northern Ireland. As part of this review the Department will consider the current levels of postgraduate funding available to Northern Ireland students and what is currently available in other areas of the UK.

Miss Woods asked the Minister for the Economy to outline her Department's current position on the issuing of licences to explore for hydrocarbons, in the context of the Assembly's recent declaration of a climate emergency.

(AQW 2527/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: In September last year, my Department completed a high level internal review of licensing policy. This review highlighted the need for a better understanding of the need for, benefits and impacts of exploration for, and extraction of, petroleum. I have recently given approval for my Department to commission independent research in this area. The aim of this research is to develop our understanding of the potential economic, environmental and societal impacts of petroleum activities, and to consider what might be required in terms of a policy, and licensing regime taking account of the climate action and environmental commitments outlined in the deal.

That research will inform my approach to the two current petroleum licence applications which are with my Department for consideration, as well as our future policy in this area.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for the Economy what is the value of the current assets held by the Presbyterian Mutual Society; and to detail the total payments received by his Department from PMS since 2012.

(AQW 2559/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: As per the most recent published Presbyterian Mutual Society Accounts as at 31 March 2019, the total value of fixed assets totalled £73,885,962, current assets totalled £26,897,892 and total creditors due in one year totalled £100,033,480 leaving a Total Assets less Current Liabilities figure of £750,374.

To date, nine repayments have been made totalling £97.75m, these are set out below.

Year	Payments Received
2011	£8,750,000
2012	£10,000,000
2013	£6,500,000
2014	£7,000,000
2015	£14,000,000
2016	£9,500,000
2017	£8,000,000
2018	£13,500,000
2019	£20,500,000
Total	£97,750,000

Miss Woods asked the Minister for the Economy to outline (i) the timescale of the strategic review of petroleum licensing; (ii) the timescale of the independent research into the economic and other impacts of petroleum licensing; and (iii) who will be conducting the review and the research.

(AQW 2619/17-22)

Mrs Dodds:

- (i) The strategic review of petroleum licensing policy is at an early stage, and will be informed by the outcome of planned independent research. The strategic review will, therefore, be an iterative process dependent on consideration of the results of the independent research and so it is not possible, at this early stage, to estimate the timescale for completing the review process. However, my Department is committed to the timely delivery of the strategic review.
- (ii) Work is currently underway to finalise the specification to procure independent NI-specific research into the social, environmental and economic impacts, benefits and disbenefits of petroleum exploration. The Department has bid for capital funding to undertake the research in the 2020/21 financial year. It is anticipated that the research itself will take between 4 and 6 months.
- (iii) The Department is undertaking the strategic review. The ongoing procurement process will identify an independent contractor to deliver the research.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy when she will answer AQW 2597/17-22 and the reason for the delay.

(AQW 2926/17-22)

Mrs Dodds: AQW 2597/17-22 was answered on 28 February 2020.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Beggs asked the Assembly Commission what the estimated annual expenditure is for the provision of simultaneous translation into other languages for (i) Assembly Plenary sessions; and (ii) Assembly committees.

(AQW 2247/17-22)

Mrs D Kelly (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The role of the Assembly Commission is to provide the Assembly, or ensure that the Assembly is provided, with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes.

The estimated annual cost of providing the current level of simultaneous translation (simultaneous translation from Irish to English is provided for the Speaker and Clerks at Table) during plenary sittings of the Assembly is c£22,000. No simultaneous translation service is provided in respect of Assembly Committee meetings.

The Assembly has not as yet requested any additional requirements relating to either the provision of simultaneous translation into other languages for (i) Assembly Plenary sessions; or (ii) Assembly committees.

Once the Assembly has finalised its requirements, the Assembly Commission can consider the estimated annual expenditure relevant to the exercise of its functions.

Mr Beggs asked the Assembly Commission what the estimated cost is for the capital investment required for equipment to provide simultaneous translation into other languages for (i) Assembly Plenary sessions; and (ii) Assembly committees.

(AQW 2248/17-22)

Mrs D Kelly (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The role of the Assembly Commission is to provide the Assembly, or ensure that the Assembly is provided, with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes.

Ongoing provision of the current simultaneous translation service (simultaneous translation from Irish to English is provided for the Speaker and Clerks at Table during plenary sittings) requires no additional capital investment.

The Assembly has not as yet requested any additional requirements relating to either the provision of simultaneous translation into other languages for (i) Assembly Plenary sessions; or (ii) Assembly committees.

Once the Assembly has finalised its requirements, the Assembly Commission can consider the estimated capital investment required relevant to the exercise of its functions.

Ms S Bradley asked the Assembly Commission, in relation to potential challenges that may arise from COVID-19, what investigatory work they have carried out regarding remote access to Assembly committee meetings to ensure quorum can be achieved.

(AQW 3054/17-22)

Mr Blair (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The potential challenges to the conduct of Assembly business in relation to COVID-19 are complex and difficult to anticipate. The Assembly Commission will make decisions based on best advice from the Public Health Agency and other public bodies as appropriate.

In relation to remote access to Assembly Committee meetings, Standing Order 49(5) allows a quorum to be present where members are linked to the meeting by a video-conferencing facility. Assembly Broadcasting have previously provided the video-conferencing facility to allow witnesses to give evidence to Committee during a meeting. However, this has been on a very limited basis.

Officials are currently undertaking further investigatory work on how this might be able to work in circumstances where a number of Members are unable to physically attend a committee meeting.

In addition, the Assembly's Clerk/Chief Executive has established an Assembly Secretariat COVID-19 Planning Group, which will keep measures in relation to COVID-19 under constant review.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 14 February 2020

Revised Written Answers

Department of Health

In this Bound Volume, page WA 61, replace the answer given for AQW 1231/17-22 with:

Mr Buckley asked the Minister of Health what progress has been made on the implementation of the Protect Life 2 - Suicide Prevention Strategy.

(AQW 1231/17-22)

Mr Swann: Construction and Procurement Delivery of the Department of Finance has not awarded a collaborative contract which specifically covers the supply of plastic bags. However, plastic bags and bin liners have been provided for waste and recycling purposes.

The New Decade New Approach sets out the possible outline of a future Programme for Government which includes creating a plan to eliminate plastic pollution. My Department has already begun work on this area and is partnering with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Sustainable NI on a Tackling Plastic project to influence public behaviour on single-use plastics and work with schools, businesses, local Councils and the public sector to provide advice on how to reduce or eliminate single-use plastic.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

In this Bound Volume, page WA 110, replace the answer given for AQW 1869/17-22 with:

Mr Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 1384/17-22, to list the objective criteria upon which Ministerial decisions pertaining to the award or withholding of consent for marine construction licences for Islandmagee Energy Ltd will be made.

(AQW 1869/17-22)

Mr Poots: Answer is shown in Annex A attached.

Annex A

NICSHR is responsible for actively seeking to fill posts at the request of the NICS departments. The table below provides the total number of posts the NICS departments has asked NICSHR to actively fill on their behalf. The information presented reflects the position as at 2 January 2020

Analogous Grade	DAERA	DE	DFC	DfE	DfI	DoF	DoH	DOJ	PPS	TEO	Total
SCS	2	1	3	2	1	8	3	6		3	29
Grade 6	1	4	2	2	2	2		1	1		15
Grade 7	11	1	13	16	7	14	12	8			82
DP	53	10	24	34	26	29	11	30	2	4	223
SO	101	12	72	36	63	71	15	37		13	420
EO1	74	1	69	13	27	39	5	20	2		250
EO2	73	2	126	12	12	50	4	11	4	5	299
AO	41	8	60	16	121	60	3	39	5	3	356
AA	6	2	14	6	31	44		4	11		118

Analogous Grade	DAERA	DE	DFC	DfE	DfI	DoF	DoH	DOJ	PPS	TEO	Total
Uniformed Grades								28			28
Total	362	41	383	137	290	317	53	184	25	28	1820

Notes:

Figures provided are vacancies for Permanent and Temporary/Fixed Term staff (including analogous grades) at 02 January 2020 which have been approved by Departments and forwarded to NICS HR to fill.

Figures exclude vacancies in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland. Information on the location of vacancies is not readily available.

Department of Justice

In this Bound Volume, page WA 93, replace the answer given for AQW 1264/17-22 with:

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to outline the programmes and support her Department are engaged in with the local community, to prevent young people getting a criminal record.

(AQW 1264/17-22)

Mrs Long: I recognise the long-term impact that having a criminal record can have, which is why early intervention is a key priority for my Department. We are working with children, families, communities and statutory and voluntary sector partners to address vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour through targeted support and intervention, to prevent children and young people being drawn into the criminal justice system.

Getting the right support at the right time is essential if we are to help those on the margins of the justice system and educate them on the consequences of risk taking and offending behaviour. In recognition of this, the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) has made some significant strategic and operational changes, with a dedicated Early Intervention (EI) team now appointed to support and develop the use of EI across all their regional teams, with designated EI workers in each region. This has been made possible through redirection and prioritisation of budgets – savings made from a reduction in numbers of court-ordered supervision cases have been invested in ‘front end’ services.

Prioritisation of this work has enabled staff to identify problems and intervene with children and families at a much earlier stage, before issues escalate. They deliver bespoke programmes of intervention and support families to access universal or specialist services in the community.

In a further development, a partnership with PSNI now enables YJA staff to support children referred by police when they have received a Community Resolution Notice (CRN) for low level offending. The onus is on educating and empowering children to make better-informed decisions and reduce likelihood of offending behaviour, rather than criminalising them through the formal system.

YJA’s Schools Programme also continues to expand in line with this focus on EI. Whilst initially developed in 2015 in response to public disorder in North Belfast, YJA staff now engage with thousands of pupils each year through educational workshops on issues which have the potential to bring children into the justice system e.g. antisocial behaviour, sexting, internet safety, drugs and alcohol etc.

Aside from the YJA work, you will also be aware that co-ordination of the cross Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime is hosted by my Department. Funding has been provided to projects which aim to build relationships with young people who are identified as being at higher risk of involvement in criminality and to deliver programmes that develop resilience and increase awareness of risk factors. The Executive Action Plan also supports projects which provide educational resources and activities to help young people develop new skills, build knowledge and examine their own attitudes to law and order.

The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS), administered by my Department, also provides funding for a range of projects aimed at preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime. While not specifically targeted at young people, many of the projects funded by ARCS provide a number of activities and interventions, often in community settings, including drug support projects, restorative justice initiatives and awareness and diversionary projects. In the current financial year, ARCS has allocated nearly £1million in funding to 49 projects across Northern Ireland.

The overall success of these partnership approaches to Early Intervention can clearly be seen. There have been significant reductions in both the numbers of children entering the justice system for the first time, and the numbers being dealt with through the formal court system. The latest statistics are attached at Annex A for your information.

As well as keeping children and young people out of the criminal justice system and thereby preventing them getting a criminal record, this work also helps to deliver on Outcome 7 of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) – We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other. This work is vital if we are to promote lawfulness and build a long-term civic society respectful of the law and others.

A new Community Safety Framework is also being developed to provide an operational roadmap on how to deliver these safer community aspirations set out in the PfG. This Framework will build on the previous Community Safety Strategy by supporting communities to be safe and resilient through crime prevention, whilst also addressing the issues of underlying harm and vulnerability that can lead to offending behaviour.

As a Department, I believe we have a very good story to tell on the work we are currently engaged in to prevent children and young people entering the justice system, and getting a criminal record, with all the negative consequences that often follow.

Annex A

Under 18s First Time Entrants to Justice System¹

Outcome	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Diversion	1412	1258	1105	847	880	699	653
Conviction	143	135	100	83	96	94	68
Total FTE	1555	1393	1205	930	976	793	721

The number of children entering the justice system for the first time has fallen by nearly 54% since 2011.

Youth courts business²

	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Youth criminal defendants received	2,799	2,035	1,780	1,438	1,518	1,446
Youth criminal defendants disposed	3,023	2,050	1,874	1,398	1,532	1,443

The number of children disposed of through the Youth Courts has fallen by 52% since 2011

1 <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/first-time-entrants-2017-18.pdf>

2 <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Judicial%20Statistics%202018.pdf>

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 February 2020

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Speaker's Rulings

The Speaker responded to a point of order on Monday 10 February by Mr Allister about remarks made to him by the Minister of Finance during Question Time.

2.2 Tributes to former Members

The Speaker invited the Assembly to pay respects to the eight former Members who had passed away during the period when the Assembly was not sitting. The Speaker paid his own tribute to those former Members before inviting tributes from other Members.

Members of the Assembly then paid tribute to former Members who had passed away during the period when the Assembly was not sitting.

3. Matter of the Day

3.1 Death of Harry Gregg OBE

Ms Claire Sugden made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the death of Harry Gregg OBE on 16 February 2020. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

4. Assembly Business

4.1 Motion: Business Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Ms Martina Anderson be appointed as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure and as a member of the Committee for Justice.

Mr John O'Dowd

Ms Sinéad Ennis

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried**.

4.2 Motion: Committee Membership**Proposed:**

That Mr Gary Middleton replace Mr Harry Harvey as a member of the Committee on Procedures; and that Mr Harry Harvey replace Mr Gary Middleton as a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

*Mr Keith Buchanan
Mr George Robinson*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried**.

5. Committee Business**5.1 Motion: Prayer of Annulment - The Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/61)****Proposed:**

That the Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/61) be annulled.

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

The Motion was not moved.

5.2 Motion: Prayer of Annulment - The Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/65)**Proposed:**

That the Sea Fish (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/65) be annulled.

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

The Motion was not **moved**.

The sitting was suspended at 1.25pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.00pm, the Speaker in the Chair.

6. Question Time**6.1 The Executive Office**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mrs Naomi Long.

The Principal Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

6.3 Communities

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Communities, Ms Deirdre Hargey.

6.4 Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Mr Edwin Poots.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.01pm.

Mr Alex Maskey

The Speaker

17 February 2020

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 11 February 2020 – 17 February 2020

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Construction Industry Training Board NI Annual Report 2018-19 (Department for the Economy)
 - Insolvency Service Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19 (Department for the Economy)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - SR 2020/19 The Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Department of Health)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
 - The Minister of Finance – 2019-20 Public Expenditure Further Allocations
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 17 February 2020

2017-2022 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

2017-2022 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA 01/17-22)	03/02/20							

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 February 2020

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

The Speaker made some remarks recognising the work done by staff in the past 6 weeks, informed Members that he had written to Ministers reminding them of key procedures and conventions, and that he welcomes Members raising procedural concerns and points of order.

3. Assembly Business

Motion: Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights

Proposed:

That, as provided for in Standing Order 53(1), this Assembly appoints an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights as set out in paragraph 28 of Part 2 of the New Decade, New Approach document; and to submit a report to the Assembly by 28 February 2022.

Composition: Democratic Unionist Party, 2;
Sinn Féin, 2;
Social Democratic and Labour Party, 1;
Ulster Unionist Party, 1;
Alliance Party, 1.

Quorum: The quorum shall be five members except when no decision is taken or question put to the Committee, when the quorum shall be four.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine.

Mr Keith Buchanan

Mr John O'Dowd

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Robbie Butler

Ms Kellie Armstrong

Ms Clare Bailey

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried**.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Motion: Suspension of Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4)

Proposed:

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 24 February 2020.

Minister of Finance

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

4.2 Motion: Supply Resolution for the 2019-2020 Spring Supplementary Estimates**Proposed:**

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £17,519,166,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 and that resources, not exceeding £21,022,321,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020 as summarised for each Department or other public body in Columns 2 (c) and 3 (c) of Table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020.

Minister of Finance

4.2 Motion: Supply Resolution for the 2020-2021 Vote on Account**Proposed:**

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,962,895,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 and that resources, not exceeding £9,054,440,000, be authorised for use by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2021 as summarised for each Department or other public body in Columns 4 and 6 of Table 1 in the Northern Ireland Estimates Vote on Account 2020-2021 that was laid before the Assembly on 19 February 2020.

Minister of Finance

A single debate ensued on both motions.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

Deputy Speaker McGlone took the Chair.

5. Question Time**5.1 Economy**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Economy, Mrs Diane Dodds.

5.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir.

Deputy Speaker Beggs took the Chair.

6. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)**6.1 Motion: Supply Resolution for the 2019-2020 Spring Supplementary Estimates (cont'd)****Motion: Supply Resolution for the 2020-2021 Vote on Account (cont'd)**

Debate resumed on both motions.

The Question being put, the Motion on the Supply Resolution for the 2019-2020 Spring Supplementary Estimates was **carried** with cross-community support.

The Question being put, the Motion on the 2020-2021 Vote on Account was **carried** with cross-community support.

6.2 First Stage: Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22)

A Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the years ending 31 March 2020 and 2021; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources for those years; to revise the limits on the use of certain accruing resources in the year ending 31 March 2020; and to authorise the Department of Finance to borrow on the credit of the sum appropriated for the year ending 31 March 2021.

The Budget Bill (NIA 02/17-22) passed First Stage and was ordered to be printed.

The Deputy Speaker informed the Assembly that the Office of the Speaker had received correspondence from the Committee for Finance stating that, in order to ensure that the Budget Bill can proceed, the Committee had reluctantly agreed that, without prejudice to the level of detail that the Committee will expect when the Department of Finance consults the Committee on future Budget Bills, the Committee is satisfied that under these extenuating circumstances, in this case only, the consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill has been appropriate, as required under Standing Order 42(2).

7. Adjournment**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.41pm.

Mr Alex Maskey

The Speaker

24 February 2020

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 18 February 2020 – 24 February 2020

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
Budget Bill (NIA Bill 02/17-22).
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
SR 2020/20 The Sea Fish Licensing (Revocation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).

SR 2020/21 The Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
The Minister of Health – RQIA Review of the Governance of Outpatient Services.
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2019-2020 (Department of Finance).
Northern Ireland Estimates: Vote on Account 2020-2021 (Department of Finance).
Charities Annual Report 2019 (Department for Communities).
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 February 2020

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Second Stage Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22)

Minister of Finance

The Minister of Finance, Mr Conor Murphy, moved the Second Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22).

Debate ensued.

Deputy Speaker McGlone took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Finance

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance, Mr Conor Murphy.

3.2 Health

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 Second Stage Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22) (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Principal Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair.

Deputy Speaker McGlone took the Chair.

The Budget Bill (NIA 02/17-22) passed Second Stage with cross-community support (Division).

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 9.08pm.

Mr Alex Maskey

The Speaker

25 February 2020

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 February 2020
Division

Motion - Second Stage Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22)

Minister of Finance

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 42

Noes: 3

AYES

Nationalist

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Mr Catney, Mr Durkan, Ms Flynn, Ms C Kelly, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGrath, Mr McHugh, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Toole.

Unionist

Dr Aiken, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Frew, Mr Harvey, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Mr Lyttle, Mr Muir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan, Ms Mullan.

NOES

Unionist

Mr Allister.

Other

Mr Carroll, Miss Woods.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Carroll, Miss Woods

Total Votes	45	Total Ayes	42	[93.3%]
Nationalist Votes	21	Nationalist Ayes	21	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	18	Unionist Ayes	17	[94.4%]
Other Votes	6	Other Ayes	4	[66.7%]

The motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 25 February 2020

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
Funds in Court in Northern Ireland – Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2019.
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
SR 2020/22 The Common Agricultural Policy (Direct Payments to Farmers) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as 25 February 2020

2017-2022 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget Bill (NIA Bill 02/17-22)	24/02/20	25/02/20	/	/				

2017-2022 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA Bill 01/17-22)	03/02/20							

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 March 2020

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Inter-Ministerial Group

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the Inter-Ministerial Group, following which he replied to questions.

Deputy Speaker McGlone took the Chair.

2.2 Statement – Afforestation Programme

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the Afforestation Programme, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Consideration Stage: Budget Bill (NIA Bill 02/17-22)

The Minister of Finance, Mr Conor Murphy, moved the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22).

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 1 to 8 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Schedules 1 to 4 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was agreed without division.

The Budget Bill NIA 02/17-22 stood referred to the Speaker.

2.4 Motion: Legislative Programme

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the Executive's Legislative Programme as presented by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in their statement of 11 February 2020.

The Executive Office

The Assembly was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Executive Office

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, the Rt Hon Arlene Foster.

3.2 Infrastructure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Infrastructure, Ms Nichola Mallon.

The Principal Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 Statement – Novel Coronavirus COVID-19

The Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann, made a statement regarding the novel Coronavirus COVID-19, following which he replied to questions.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4.2 Motion: Legislative Programme (cont'd)

Debate resumed

The Question being put, the motion was **carried**.

Deputy Speaker Beggs took the Chair

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion: Violent Crime

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern about increasing levels of violent crime; recognises that this has been accompanied by a similar rise in alcohol and drug related offences; notes the effect of such crime on victims and on communities across Northern Ireland; further notes that comprehensive legislation protecting victims of domestic violence has yet to be passed; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work collaboratively with the Minister of Health to bring forward an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending.

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mr Colin McGrath

Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'crime' and insert:

'highlights that in 2018-19 violence against the person accounted for more than one third of all recorded crime in Northern Ireland; notes with concern the assessment by the Police Service of Northern Ireland that crime against women and children is increasing and the resulting harm becoming more severe; further notes the effect of such crime on victims and on communities across Northern Ireland; regrets that comprehensive legislation protecting victims of domestic violence has yet to be passed; notes that the public consultation on the Sentencing Review Northern Ireland, which sought views specifically on sentencing in respect of deaths by dangerous driving, attacks on elderly people and attacks on blue light services, closed on 3 February 2020; and calls on the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation for tougher sentencing for violent crimes and to work collaboratively with the Minister of Health and victims' advocates to introduce an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending.'

Mr Mervyn Storey

Mr Paul Givan

Amendment 2**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'collaboratively' and insert:

'with Executive Ministers to bring forward an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending, including by addressing the root causes of offending behaviour such as addiction, mental illness, and poverty.'

Ms Linda Dillon

Ms Martina Anderson

Mr Pat Sheehan

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 **fell** (Division).

The Question being put, Amendment 2 was **made**.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5.2 Motion: Ongoing Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland**Proposed:**

That this Assembly recognises that many communities across Northern Ireland are still living under siege from paramilitary gangs; reiterates its total rejection of those who continue to engage in criminality, intimidation and coercive control; gives its full support to the agencies working to close down criminal networks and activity; and calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other agencies are properly resourced to allow them to increase their efforts in addressing ongoing paramilitarism.

Mr Doug Beattie

Mr Andy Alan

Mr Alan Chambers

Amendment 1**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'activity' and insert:

'acknowledges that paramilitarism is being used as a cover for profiteering criminal gangs; further recognises that addressing the pervasive influences of poverty, deprivation and lack of opportunity in working class communities across Northern Ireland is critical to releasing the grip of criminals; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce Unexplained Wealth Orders to allow the PSNI to disrupt and dismantle these gangs and to work with her Executive colleagues to fully resource the PSNI and other agencies to eradicate the influence of paramilitarism.'

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 was made.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was carried without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 9.04pm.

Mr Alex Maskey

The Speaker

2 March 2020

Northern Ireland Assembly

2 March 2020

Division

Violent Crime (Amendment 1)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'crime' and insert:

'highlights that in 2018-19 violence against the person accounted for more than one third of all recorded crime in Northern Ireland; notes with concern the assessment by the Police Service of Northern Ireland that crime against women and children is increasing and the resulting harm becoming more severe; further notes the effect of such crime on victims and on communities across Northern Ireland; regrets that comprehensive legislation protecting victims of domestic violence has yet to be passed; notes that the public consultation on the Sentencing Review Northern Ireland, which sought views specifically on sentencing in respect of deaths by dangerous driving, attacks on elderly people and attacks on blue light services, closed on 3 February 2020; and calls on the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation for tougher sentencing for violent crimes and to work collaboratively with the Minister of Health and victims' advocates to introduce an action plan and a resourced implementation plan to reduce violent offending and the risk of reoffending.'

Mr Mervyn Storey

Mr Paul Givan

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 32

Noes: 42

AYES

Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mr Beattie, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Stewart, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr M Bradley, Mr Robinson.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Ms C Kelly, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Mr McNulty, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole, Ms Rogan, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Dillon, Mr McGrath.

Amendment 1 **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 26 February 2020 – 2 March 2020

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Autism Strategy 2013-2020 - Second Progress Report 2018 (Department of Health)
 - Agriculture Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - SR 2020/23 - The Public Health Notifiable Diseases Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Department of Health)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
 - The Minister of Health – Response to the Emergence of Coronavirus (2019 NCoV) – Update 26 February 2020
 - The Minister for Infrastructure – Vehicle Testing Services Update
 - The Minister of Health – Response to the Emergence of Coronavirus (2019 NCoV) – Update 28 February 2020
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
 - Executive Sub-Committee – EU Exit – Terms of Reference (The Executive Office)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 March 2020

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Further Consideration Stage Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22)

Minister of Finance

The Minister of Finance, Mr Conor Murphy, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 2/17-22).

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

NIA Bill 02/17-22 stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with Section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion: Crime and Older People

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister of Justice to develop a departmental and cross-agency plan to implement the recommendations of the May 2019 Report of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland entitled Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland.

*Mr Mervyn Storey
Ms Joanne Bunting*

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion: Areas of Natural Constraint

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs decision to end Areas of Natural Constraint support; notes that the decision has had a negative impact on farmers in Severely Disadvantaged Areas; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to use the powers contained within Schedule 6 of the Agriculture Bill (HC Bill 7) to bring forward a new Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

*Mr Declan McAleer
Ms Jemma Dolan
Mr Philip McGuigan*

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.59pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mrs Naomi Long.

4.2 Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Mr Edwin Poots.

Deputy Speaker Beggs took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

5.1 Motion: Areas of Natural Constraint (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the motion was carried (Division).

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Mr Robin Newton spoke to his topic regarding investment in the Comber Greenway.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.02pm.

Mr Alex Maskey

The Speaker

3 March 2020

Northern Ireland Assembly

3 March 2020

Division

Areas of Natural Constraint

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs decision to end Areas of Natural Constraint support; notes that the decision has had a negative impact on farmers in Severely Disadvantaged Areas; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to use the powers contained within Schedule 6 of the Agriculture Bill (HC Bill 7) to bring forward a new Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

*Mr Declan McAleer
Ms Jemma Dolan
Mr Philip McGuigan*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 29

AYES

Dr Aiken, Mr Allen, Ms Anderson, Dr Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Blair, Mr Boylan, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Catney, Mr Chambers, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ennis, Ms Flynn, Mr Gildernew, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Ms C Kelly, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Kimmins, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McHugh, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Muir, Ms Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sheerin, Mr Stewart.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Dolan, Ms Sheerin.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dodds, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr M Bradley, Mr Robinson.

The motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 3 March 2020

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Northern Ireland Audit Office Report – Continuous Improvement in Policing (Northern Ireland Audit Office)
 - The Sports Council for Northern Ireland (Sport NI) Annual Report and Accounts 2017-18 (Department for Communities)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as 3 March 2020

2017-2022 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget Bill (NIA Bill 02/17-22)	24/02/20	25/02/20	/	/	02/03/20	03/03/20		

2017-2022 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA Bill 01/17-22)	03/02/20							

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

